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"HO, HO, HO!" LAUGHED OLD SUNFLOWER, "THIS HYER IS JEST AS GOOD AS A CIRCUS, I RECKON."

Old Sunflower,

THE HAYSEED DETECTIVE;

OR, TRAPPING TWO

NEW YORK SHARPERS.

The Story of a Tangled City-Trail.

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AUTHOR OF "THE WOLVES OF NEW YORK,"
"OVERLAND KIT," "CALIFORNIA DETEC-
TIVE," "BRONZE JACK," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGER.

It was high noon.

Two well-dressed men met on Courtlandt street, a block from the Pennsylvania Railway Ferry in New York's great city.

One a tall, swarthy, heavily-built man, with a sallow face and jet-black hair.

This was Boss Jim Brighton, one of the leading sports of the metropolis.

The other was slender and boyish-looking, with mild blue eyes and yellow hair, a regular Sunday-school-style fellow, so to speak.

One in whom there was no guile.

"Hello, Kid! where did you spring from?" the sport inquired as he grasped the other by the hand.

"Chicago," responded the slender fellow.

"Did the 'windy city' grow too hot to hold you?"

"Yes, two of my pals were nailed by my side, I gave the peeler my foot, sending him into the gutter, then did the vanishing act and here I am!"

Despite his innocent, dudish appearance the speaker bore the reputation of being one of the keenest confidence-men in America.

"How are you heeled?" asked the sport.

"Well, I haven't got any more 'cases' (dollars) than I know what to do with, but that does not worry me, for you know there is a sucker born every minute, and men of genius, like myself, never starve."

"Ah, you have got onto some racket, eh?"

"Yes, I come across Old Dave Beltram before I had been an hour in town. He is running a bunco-game now on Prince street, just off of Broadway, and he jumped at the chance to get me to work for him."

"I don't wonder at it, for there isn't a better man in the business than yourself."

"Ah, now, you flatter me!" the confidence-man responded, languidly.

"But, though self-praise I despise, yet I must say that there isn't many men in my line who can go ahead of yours truly, Tommy Melvine, alias Tommy, the Kid, to command."

"Working the thing all alone?"

"Yes, I am obliged to for I haven't a pal. I will not work, you see, except with an extra good man, and such fellows are not to be met with on every corner."

"Can you do the trick all by yourself?"

"Well, it is not quite so easy as when I have the assistance of a pal, but I manage to get along."

While the conversation had been going on the bunco-man had been engaged in watching the passengers coming up the street from the ferry.

The two were on the north side of the street while the majority of the passengers came up on the south sidewalk.

At this point Tommy Kid's gaze fell on an old gentleman, with a carpet-bag, who was coming slowly up the street, staring at everything about him as though he was a countryman who had never been in a big city before.

"There is a man I think I can work!" the sharper exclaimed.

"Old Uncle Hayseed, with the carpet-bag, coming up the street?" said the sport.

"Yes, the man that looks like a Western drover, with the long hair and short beard, and a face like a sunflower."

The description was singularly exact.

The stranger was a tall, broad-shouldered, muscularly-built man of fifty, or thereabouts, with a full, round face, tinted a reddish bronze by the rays of the sun.

His hair was a peculiar tawny gray in color, worn quite long, and as it was slightly curly, it stuck out from under his broad-brimmed slouch hat in an extremely odd manner.

The upper lip was smoothly shaven, and also the upper chin, under which grew a silky fringe of curling whiskers of the same odd tint as the hair, and owing to these circumstances the face of the stranger did bear a resemblance to a sunflower.

The Westerner was carelessly dressed, although the suit he wore was an expensive one, but his whole appearance indicated that he was one of those peculiar men who did not care a button for their personal appearance.

"He is my mutton!" Tommy Kid declared. "I don't usually make a mistake in sizing up my men, and I set down this big galoot as being a man of wealth from the wild and woolly West, who has come on here to see the sights of the big city, and I would be willing to bet a small farm that he carries a big 'leather' well lined with Uncle Sam's promises to pay."

"Just keep your eyes peeled and see me go for him."

"Good luck to you, Tommy!" the sport exclaimed.

The other nodded, his face wearing a confident smile, and crossed the street.

Straight to the stranger the confidence-man proceeded, barred his way, and, with outstretched hand, cried:

"Well, well! if you ain't about the last man I expected to see in New York! Give us your paw, old man; how did you leave all the folks at home?"

The big stranger stared in bewilderment for a moment, but, half unconsciously, put out his hand, which the other immediately seized and shook in a hearty way.

"By gol! young man, I kinder think you have got the best of me, but I'm durned glad to see you all the same, 'cos that is the kind of a jack-rabbit I am!" the old fellow exclaimed, in a deep base voice.

"I knew you the moment I set eyes on you, though it is five or six years since I was out in your town!" the confidence-man exclaimed, still gripping the hand of the other in the most affectionate manner.

"Wal, I hain't changed much in that time, I reckon for a fact!"

"Changed! you haven't changed a bit!" the other declared. "I would have known you anywhere, and I can tell you that I am mighty glad to see an old acquaintance in this big town."

"Are you located here?"

"No, only come on to see the sights. Chicago is my headquarters, but it wasn't in Chicago that I met you but in your own town."

"What, not in Bitter Creek?" the Westerner exclaimed.

"That is the town as sure as you are born!" the other replied. "And I had your name on the end of my tongue a moment ago, just as pat as can be, but I am blessed if it hasn't slipped me for a wonder!"

"Wal, I want to know?" the old fellow ejaculated.

"Fact! and I was just going to hail you when my memory slipped up."

"It wasn't Smith now, I reckon, John Smith?" the old fellow continued with a grin.

"Oh, no, no Smith in mine, thank you, but the John sounds sort of familiar."

"How will Jonathan suit you?" the Westerner asked with a grin.

"I reckon you have hit it!" the confidence-man declared. "Although I am blessed if I could remember the name, but then I have an awful treacherous memory at times."

"Jonathan Flowers is my handle, and I ain't ashamed of the name either, you bet!" the old fellow declared.

"But out in Bitter Creek thar, whar even the yaller dogs know that I am the owner of the Sunflower Ranch, one of the richest bits of s'ile that the sun ever shone on, every man, woman and child call me Old Sunflower, and the handle has stuck to me for so long that I will be blamed if half the time when some strange galoot axes my name if it hain't hard work to keep from blurting out, 'Old Sunflower, dog-gone it!'"

And then the old fellow threw back his head and laughed like a man who did not have a care in the world.

Tommy Kid laughed also, and fully as gleefully as the Westerner.

"Now that is just what bothered me about calling you by name!" he declared. "I remembered Old Sunflower all right, but I couldn't think of your other handle to save me."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Old Sunflower, "this hyer is jest as good as a circus, I reckon."

"Oh, yes, and I am mighty glad to see you, I can tell you!" the confidence-man declared. "I was getting awful lonesome in this big town, where, outside of my business acquaintances, I don't know ten people, but now that I have struck you, we will have some fun together. I have been here long enough to know the ropes and I can show you around town."

"I don't suppose you remember my name after all this time?"

"No, I don't, for a fact! And if you hadn't hailed me I never should have suspected I had ever run across you, and it 'pears to me now as if that 'ar is kinder of a joke, hey?" and then the old man indulged in another hearty laugh.

"I am just going to lunch, will you come along with me? My name, by the way, is Thomas Kid."

"Sho! wa-al, you had a mighty narrer squeeze from being called Thomas Cat, hey?" and then the Westerner laughed again.

The two were now walking up the street, side by side, like old friends, and the sport, who had watched the performance from the other side of the street with a great deal of interest, now turned away, chuckling in his sleeve at the ease

with which the bunco-steerer had beguiled the stranger.

And the confidence-man himself was a little astonished by the ease with which the game had been worked, for despite the honest, innocent face of the old fellow, there was a sbrewd twinkle in his eyes every now and then, which seemed to indicate that he was far from being the stupid country bumpkin that his appearance denoted.

Tommy Kid took Old Sunflower to a prominent restaurant and there treated him to an elaborate lunch, which was washed down by a bottle of excellent wine.

The Westerner, drawing forth a fat wallet, wanted to pay his share, but the other would not hear of it.

"Oh, no, it is my treat this time, old man!" he cried.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE DEN.

AFTER the lunch was eaten the confidence-man purchased choice cigars for himself and Old Sunflower, and suggested a walk up Broadway.

The Kid was anxious to proceed to business as soon as possible.

He had seen that the Westerner had a big roll of bark-notes in his wallet, and he was anxious to transfer the money to his own pocket.

So as they walked up the street he began operations.

"This is a great town, this New York," he said.

"Wal, I s'pose I will have to admit that it is a little ahead of Bitter Creek," Old Sunflower responded, with a good-natured grin.

"The amount of money that is laying around loose in this city is astonishing!" the Kid declared.

"This is the place to come if a man has a little capital to start on and wants to make money fast."

"Jest so, jest so, that is what I have allers heerd," the Westerner remarked. "And that reminds me of a little speculation which I am kinder hankering to rope some man with ducats into."

"A speculation, eh?"

"Yas, and it is one that has got an all-fired sight of money into it if I am any judge of the way the cat jumps!" And the old man gave the young fellow such a hearty poke in the ribs with his iron-like fist that it almost sent him reeling into the gutter.

"Hol' on! whar are ye going?" exclaimed Old Sunflower, catching the Kid by the shoulder.

"Reckon I pawed ye a leetle too heavily, eh? You wasn't braced for any old he-b'ar business. Wal—wal, I will have to be a little more keerful how I handle ye."

"I'm old, but I'm awful powerful and tough," he continued. "One of the half-hoss, half-alligator breed, chain-lightning from the word go!"

"Yes, I wasn't prepared for any little foolishness of the kind," the confidence-man remarked, wondering at the strength of the old man.

"I'll jest warn ye to brace up and have some style about ye the next time I go for to give ye a playful dig in the ribs," the Westerner remarked.

"Oh, that is all right. I will be on my guard in the future."

"But speaking of this hyer speculation that I have got in my noddle, there is a power of money in it, I tell yer! Stranger, I have got a pair of brindle steers that will weigh over two thousand apiece and I wish I may be kicked to death by lame grasshoppers if they ain't the prettiest beasts that ever planted a huff on top of this hyer footstool!"

And to give due emphasis to the words the old man brought his big hand down with such force upon the shoulder of the Kid that it made that worthy wince with pain.

"If either of the steers are a bigger brute than you they certainly are wonders," was the thought of the shrinking sharper.

"Oh, they are jest awfully nice, reg'lar splendiferous cattle," Old Sunflower continued. "I reckon it would do your heart good to see 'em, stranger, and thar's a heap of money in 'em, too; put 'em in a tent, you know, and charge fifty cents a head for to see 'em. Why, man alive! a feller could make a hundred dollars a day out of the thing jest as easy as rolling off a log."

"Ah, yes, no doubt, and that is what brought you to New York, eh, to dispose of the brindle steers?"

"That was the main thing, I will have to allow, and then I wanted, too, to take a look at this hyer big, overgrown city which I have heerd so much about."

The confidence-man was a quick-witted fellow and thought he saw a chance to turn the "steers" to an account.

"I am very glad you spoke to me about the cattle," he said. "For I think I know a man who will be glad to go into the speculation."

"You don't tell me?" the old fellow exclaimed.

"Wal, now, gol darn it! if it wasn't the luckiest thing in the world that I happened to run across you!"

"Yes, this gentleman understands all about cattle, and as he made his pile in the show busi-

ness too, he is just the man to jump at the chance to get into a good speculation of this kind."

"And he has got the ducats all right, I s'pose, to put up?" the Westerner inquired with a wise shake of his big head.

"You see, I have got my eye-teeth cut, and I have heered all 'bout these cute New Yorkers—how they go 'round cheating each other and call it business, and I don't want any of that in mine if I know myself, and you kin bet a pile of rocks that Old Sunflower does."

"Oh, that is all right! this man is worth a million!"

"You don't mean it?" the big fellow exclaimed in wonder.

"Yes, sir, a million in clean cash!" the confidence-man declared, impressively.

"He is jest the kind of man that I am looking for!" Old Sunflower exclaimed with a grin.

"The chances are big that he will make a trade with you, and a good one too, for he is a liberal sort of fellow and makes a point of always paying the cash right down on the nail."

"That's the right way to do business! Men of that kind suit me to a hair!"

"He is engaged now in running one of the biggest money-making schemes there is in New York."

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes, it is a fact. He is the general agen for the United States of the Royal Frankfor Consolidated Bond Company."

"What in thunder is that?"

"Well, really, when you come right down to the bottom facts in the case, it isn't anything more or less than a gigantic lottery, but as there is a prejudice against such things, they work this bond scheme so as to get around the law."

"I reckon this hyer is a leetle too deep for me; I'm over my head and shall have to swim out," the Westerner remarked.

"Oh, it is simple enough when you understand how the thing is worked," the Kid explained. "Instead of buying a lottery ticket, you buy a Frankfort Government bond; they are all numbered, you know, and every day there is a drawing; so many bonds sold, so many numbers put into a wheel, and the prizes drawn, just the same as any lottery."

"Ah, yes, I see; but what is the bond worth?"

"Nothing, of course; the bond scheme is only a blind so as to cover up the lottery."

"Wal, now, I must say that I think this is about as smart a trick as I ever heer tell on!" the old man declared.

"Yes, and it is a mighty good thing for a man to put a few dollars into. I make it a rule to try my luck every week, and so far I am about a hundred dollars ahead of the game."

"Wal, you are durned lucky and no mistake!"

By this time the two had reached the neighborhood of Prince street, and the confidence-man judged that the time was ripe for him to introduce the stranger to the den of the bunco-men.

"That reminds me, I ought to step into the office to-day and see how the last drawing turned out," the Kid observed.

"It is only a few doors down the street, and I will have a chance then to introduce you to the manager, so you will have an opportunity to explain about the steers."

"That is a furst-rate idee!" Old Sunflower declared.

"This is about the softest rooster I ever struck!" the confidence-man muttered to himself, as he led the way up the narrow staircase in the dingy, old-fashioned brick house where the bunco-men had their lair.

To a small back room on the second floor the Kid conducted the Westerner.

It was fitted up like an office, with a partition across the back in which was an opening, behind which a small desk was placed.

A mild-looking, middle-aged man, with iron-gray hair, was at the desk, and he greeted the confidence-man in the most cordial manner, shaking hands with him warmly.

"Ah, my dear young friend, how do you do to-day?" he exclaimed. "I have been expecting to see you drop in all the morning."

"Oh, I can't keep away, you know," and then he Kid introduced the Westerner to the bunco chief, who expressed the deep delight it gave him to meet any gentleman from the lively town of Bitter Creek.

Then the confidence-man explained about the steers, and the old gentleman said he would be pleased to go into a speculation of that kind, for he believed there was a deal of money in it.

"I will sell 'em to you dirt cheap!" the Westerner declared.

"It will be a big thing for both of you, I think," the Kid remarked. "But before you go into this steer business suppose you take a look at the returns and see if my bond has drawn anything."

"Certainly, certainly! There will be plenty of time to talk about the cattle after we get through with the bonds."

Then the gray-haired man disappeared behind the partition and the shuffling of papers could be heard; in a minute he reappeared, with a legal-looking document in his hand.

"Allow me to congratulate you, my dear young friend, you have struck it extremely rich this time, two thousand dollars!" and with a flourish the speaker cast a large package of banknotes upon the desk.

"What do you think of that, Sunflower? How is two thousand for high?" exclaimed the Kid, exultantly.

"Wal, wal, I swow if this hyer don't beat my time!" the old man declared. "You have struck it rich, and no mistake!"

"You see you played the double combination this time and that accounts for it," the cashier explained.

"Ah, yes, I see."

"There is a little formality to be gone through before I can pay you the money, you know," the middle-aged man remarked, taking up the package of bills and toying with them in a careless way.

"This is the third time you have played the double combination, you see, and if you had lost you would have had to pay two thousand, just the same amount that you have won, so all you have to do is to produce the money so as to show that you could have paid it if you had lost and I will pay the stake over to you."

"Ah, yes, I see, but, by Jove! I don't believe I can put up two thousand. Isn't there a sliding scale which allows me to put up what money I can raise and draw an equal amount?"

"Yes, yes, I had forgotten that clause!" the cashier exclaimed. "You are right. Put up what you have and I will pay over a similar amount."

Then he took the bills and pretended to count them, half-turning his back to the others.

"I can let you in for a share here!" the Kid exclaimed, hurriedly to Old Sunflower. "I have only got about five hundred in my pocket, and if you have any amount of money you can let me have it, as the more money I put up the more I can draw, and I will give you a liberal share of the prize for the loan."

"Reckon I ain't got over seven or eight hundred dollars or tharabouts," the Westerner observed, drawing out his wallet.

"That will do very nicely!" the Kid declared.

"If you give me seven or eight hundred to put up I can draw seven or eight hundred extra, and I will do the fair thing with you—give you a couple of hundred for the use of the money. I will only want it for five minutes, you know, it is a mere formality."

"Ah, yes, I see. Oh, I am game to go in to grab any money that is a-laying 'round loose, and you are safe in betting all your wealth on that!" Old Sunflower declared as he drew out his wallet, which seemed to be stuffed to overflowing with bills, and handed it to the Kid.

And then there came a sudden interruption.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE TRAIL.

INTO the room rushed two men, dressed in plain blue flannel suits, but wearing a peculiar cap, such as railroad men sport, armed with short police clubs, and bearing upon their breasts a shield with the word "detective" stamped upon it in bold letters.

"Aha! we have caught you dead to rights this time, I reckon!" the first man declared, as he snatched the Westerner's wallet out of the young man's hands, at the same time grabbing him by the shoulder.

The second man seized the package of banknotes which the gray-haired gentleman had again placed on the desk, and then turned and menaced Old Sunflower with his club.

"What does this mean?" the Kid cried, pretending to be dreadfully alarmed.

"We have caught you playing a lottery game and we want you to come right now to Judge Kelly to answer!" the first stranger declared.

"We have got the money as proof," he added, waving the wallet in the air, "and I don't think you can get out of it this time!"

"Why, Detective Benton, you know me well enough!" the gray-haired man exclaimed.

"And you ought to understand that I would not engage in any illegal transaction. We do not deal in lottery tickets but in German bonds and it has been decided by the courts that the lottery law does not affect such business."

"Well, you will have to come before the court," the detective said, apparently decidedly affected by the statement.

"If that is the truth I don't suppose I will be able to make a case out against you," he continued. "The court is now in session, and as it is only right around the corner the case can be settled immediately. I will carry the money and deposit it with the judge. You can claim it and if you are selling bonds it will have to be returned to you, of course. We will go right on and you can follow at your leisure as we will wait for you in the court-room."

And then the man turned to go.

Old Sunflower sprung forward and snatched the wallet out of his hand, the action so sudden

and unexpected that the deed was accomplished before any one suspected that the Westerner designed to make a move.

"I'll take keer of that ar' bit of leather if it is all the same to you, Mister Man!" Old Sunflower cried.

For a moment the bunco-men were aghast—the reader has guessed, of course, that the "detectives" were pals of the others, and if they had once got out of Old Sunflower's sight with the money he never would have seen it again.

Then realizing that the Westerner was not going to allow himself to be robbed as easily as they had expected, the rascals, roused to action, made a determined effort to recover the plunder.

"Do you dare to resist an officer of the law in the execution of his duty?" the first detective cried, raising his club in a threatening manner.

"My dear Mr. Flowers, don't make any trouble or you will get us all in jail!" the Kid cried. "Give the man the wallet and we will go before the judge. Everything will be all right just as soon as we explain matters to his Honor."

"Mebbe so, but you kin bet yer life that no matter what turns up I am going to hold on to this bit of calfskin as tight as an alligator to a dead nigger."

"Go ahead to your judge! I am 'wid yer,' but thar don't no two-legged man git this hyer wallet out of my fist, if this hyer court knows herself, and she thinks she does!"

"Give up that wallet or I'll break your head!" the bogus detective cried, fiercely, menacing the Westerner with his club.

The rascals were terribly exasperated by the prospect that their intended prey was going to escape.

"Sonny, don't you go for to strike me with that 'ar bit of a stick, or I will lay you across my knee and break your back for you!" Old Sunflower retorted.

Then he shoved the wallet into his pocket and assumed a warlike attitude, doubling up his huge fists.

The bunco-men realized that desperate measures alone could win the plunder, and they were just the kind of scoundrels to commit murder if money could not be got otherwise.

The bogus detective, with a muttered curse, rushed at the Westerner and tried to knock him down with the club, aiming a most vicious blow at his head.

Old Sunflower received the blow on his left arm, catching it on the fleshy part, where it did little harm, and at the same time he smote the bunco-man between the eyes—a most terrible blow, knocking the fellow across the room, and through the door into the entry, where he went down all in a heap, as the ox goes down before the stroke of the butcher.

Then from under his vest the Westerner drew a revolver, the weapon being drawn with such marvelous quickness that it was out before the rascals had any idea their destined victim designed making such a move.

The bunco-men saw that they had caught a Tartar, and fled in wild dismay, each man expecting to be shot in the back before he could get out of range.

"Come back and take another bite at me, ye galloping gophers!" the old man cried, in defiance.

But the bunco-men never heeded the invitation. They had got all they wanted of the man from the West.

"End of chapter number one, Old Sunflower chaws up the bunco-men!" quoth the Westerner, as he replaced the revolver and descended to the street, never even casting a second glance at the insensible man in the entry.

The Westerner returned to Broadway and proceeded to retrace his steps down that famous thoroughfare.

"Now I wonder what kind of a gang of sharpers will be the next to try their luck with this hyer guileless child of the wild and woolly West?" Old Sunflower muttered, as he went on his way.

"Pears to me I am kinder losing time huffing it when I mought jest as well ride," he said, abruptly.

Then he hailed a car and rode down to the Astor House, where he engaged a room, his main idea being to get rid of the carpet-bag, which he did not wish to carry with him.

"Tain't jest the thing to lug down in the Wall street deestrick," he remarked, as he left the hotel and took his way to the great money center of the metropolis.

Old Sunflower halted in front of one of the great office buildings, read the indicator until he came to the name, Udolpho Wolf, to which "Attorney-at-law" was affixed, then he took the elevator to Mr. Wolf's office.

It was a small apartment, finely furnished, and a young smooth-faced Englishman was the only occupant.

"Mr. Wolf is not hin, don't know when 'e would be back, wasn't aware of where 'e 'as gone."

"Mighty unsatisfactory this hyer," Old Sunflower commented, "seeing as how I have come a matter of two thousand miles to see him."

The Englishman shrugged his shoulders and took up his newspaper again.

The Westerner made a careful survey of the man with his keen eyes.

"I reckon you ar' a gentleman as stands pretty close to Mister Wolf?" he said.

"You are correct, sir, I ham his hown man."

"His wally, eh?"

"Yes, sir," the other responded with a disdainful air, as though impatient of cross-questioning.

"It will be worth a ten-dollar note to me if I kin git to see Mr. Wolf right away," Old Sunflower said, taking out the bill and dangling it in the face of the other.

The dull eyes of the 'gentleman's gentleman' sparkled.

"Oho! is that the kind of a chap you are?" he exclaimed.

"Can you win it?"

"Well, I 'opes I can! Go down to Long Branch, at the West End 'Otel you'll find Mr. Wolf, but as 'e his on an awful spree I don't believe it will do you much good to 'unt 'im hup."

"I'll risk it!" the Westerner remarked, transferring the bill to the other, who received it with a low bow.

Straight to the Jersey Central Depot went Old Sunflower, and took the first train for Long Branch.

For a stranger from the wild West he seemed to be well acquainted with New York and its surroundings, for he did not stop to ask a single question.

It was a little after six when the Westerner arrived at the Long Branch hotel.

Mr. Wolf was a guest there, the clerk said, but he was not in his room, he continued, and he couldn't exactly say where he was, but he presumed he would be in shortly.

The Westerner got a description of his man and then sat down and waited.

An hour passed; no Wolf appeared, and Old Sunflower consulted the clerk again, explaining that he wanted to see the gentleman upon an important business matter.

"I really don't know anything about him," the official replied. "The last time I saw the gentleman though he was pretty full, and I should not be surprised if he had retired to some quiet spot to sleep it off."

As the Westerner turned away one of the bell-boys, who had overheard the conversation, winked at him, and then sauntered out into the hall.

For all his apparent simplicity, it was plain that Old Sunflower was quick to take a hint, for he immediately followed the lad.

"Know anything about Wolf?" he asked.

"How much 'is it worth?" asked the boy, with a grin.

"A ten-dollar note, if you will put me on his track so I can get at him to-night."

"I can do it!" the boy cried, eagerly, producing a crumpled note. "He has left the Branch and you will find him at the Ben Hamet Flats, on upper Broadway. This here note is the proof that I am giving it to you straight! Wolf had a jag on and threw it away. I nipped it, for them things come useful sometimes."

The boy gave the note to the Westerner.

In a delicate woman's hand was written:

"I must see you to-night! Come immediately or there will be a dead woman in the Ben Hamet Flats, and you can have the satisfaction of burying your wife."

LAURA WOLF.

"I will keep this, and hyer's your ten!"

The exchange was made, and the Westerner hurried to the depot, but he had to wait a long time for a train, and it was nearly eleven o'clock before he arrived at his destination—a stately row of brownstone flats, in the neighborhood of Central Park.

Mr. Wolf lived on the third flat, and was at home, so the doorman said.

CHAPTER IV.

A TRAGEDY.

OLD SUNFLOWER went up in the elevator, and as he rose in the air questioned the elevator-boy.

"Mr. Wolf had come home about eight o'clock, as full as a goat, and had not gone out."

"Is Mr. Wolf a married man?"

"Yes."

"Then I can speak to his wife if he isn't in a condition to talk."

"Cert. and she is in, too."

At the door of the lawyer's apartment Old Sunflower knocked loud and long, but no response was made.

"This is mighty queer!" the old man muttered. "Both man and wife must be asleep, and sleep pretty soundly, too, or else I would surely have awakened them with all this noise."

"I s'pose I might as well give it up for a bad job and go away," he mused. "For if I hav'n't been able to make them hear me, the chances are big that nothing short of a fire-alarm will start 'em."

But just as he turned away from the door, a gentleman came along the entry—a tall, rather

thin man, dressed in a well-worn dark suit; a man of middle age, forty-five, or thereabouts, of foreign descent, to judge from his looks, for his peculiar long face, blonde hair, worn rather long and pushed behind his ears, and short, pointed, yellow beard, seemed to indicate that he was of the German race.

The spectacles which he wore gave him a clerical look, and Old Sunflower got the impression that he was a minister.

"I beg your pardon, but could you tell me where Mr. Wolf's apartments are situated?" the stranger asked, speaking with a slight accent.

"I reckon I am right at the door of 'em now!" Old Sunflower replied.

"Thanks! The elevator-boy told me they were on this floor, but I was not certain whether he said to turn to the right or left."

"Do you want to see Mr. Wolf?"

"Yes, I have been sent for in haste, but, unluckily, I was absent from home and the message only reached me a few minutes ago. I am a doctor," the gentleman explained.

"I reckon you will have a difficulty in getting in, for I have been hammering at the door for nigh onto ten minutes without being able to make anybody hear me," the Westerner remarked.

"That is very strange," the doctor answered. "A message was left at my office, at about nine o'clock, requesting me to call immediately. As I said, I was out, but as soon as I returned I came at once, for word was sent that the case was an urgent one."

"Tis kinder odd," Old Sunflower observed.

"The elevator-boy said that the gentleman was in," the doctor remarked.

"I know it, but I have knocked like old Sancho without getting an answer."

"I will try my luck."

And then the doctor rapped vigorously, but all within was as silent as the tomb.

"I do not understand it!" the doctor exclaimed, shaking his head in a solemn way.

And then he peered through the keyhole.

"The gas is burning, and the key is in the lock, so it is evident that some one is within, and it certainly is very strange that we cannot make them hear."

Then the doctor banged away at the door, striking it with the palm of his hand.

"By gum! that ought to start 'em!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "You are making noise enough to wake the soundest sleeper that ever snored."

"Not a sound!" declared the doctor, putting his ear to the keyhole.

"Can there be anything wrong?" he asked.

"It does not seem possible that any one could sleep through all this din."

"That is a fact!"

"Perhaps the man is so ill that he cannot come to the door."

"I understood from the elevator-boy that he was on a spree when he came home."

"Ah, that may account for the silence; he is stupefied with drink and unable to walk, the doctor remarked.

"But the boy said his wife was with him."

"Is that so?" exclaimed the other, surprised.

"Well, I do not understand, then, why she does not come."

"Tis odd."

"Really, I think it is my duty to report this matter to the police, for the man may be in urgent need of medical assistance. The police station is only a few steps away, and if I make a report of the matter there it will receive attention."

"Wal, I reckon that is about the right thing to do. I will wait hyer and keep watch while you are gone," the Westerner declared.

"It will not take me long!" the doctor rejoined and then hurried away.

"This hyer is a mighty queer circumstance," Old Sunflower soliloquized, as he leaned against the wall and surveyed the door in a reflective way.

"What does it mean, anyway, and how is it going to turn out?"

"It is kinder curious the way things have gone," he continued. "It was as hard work to get at this man as though he was a rascal dodging the police, and now that I have run him down I can't see him, but I will stick to the job to the end."

The Westerner did not have long to wait, for within fifteen minutes the doctor returned accompanied by two policemen and a detective in plain clothes.

"I know Wolf very well," the detective remarked as he came up. "He has been drinking very heavily for the last month, and it would not be strange if the liquor had got the best of him."

Then the officer gave a number of resounding raps on the door, waited, and shook his head when he found there was no answer.

"Get out the nippers, Maguire," he said to one of the policemen. "I didn't want to break the door in, so I had a pair of nippers brought, with which we can turn the key in the lock."

And this the detective immediately did.

The door being open the party entered.

They found themselves in an entry, from

which doors led into the various apartments of the flat.

The nearest one led into the parlor, and thither the investigators proceeded, the detective in the advance.

And as soon as his foot crossed the threshold, a cry of horror came from his lips.

Little wonder that the stout-hearted detective was startled.

In the center of the room, lying upon his back, with his staring eyes, wide open, fixed upon the ceiling, lay a portly, well-preserved man of fifty or thereabouts.

He was stone-dead, and in his hand was clutched a vial.

"It is Wolf, and he has committed suicide!" the detective cried.

A solemn hush fell upon the lookers-on; they stared at the dead man and then at each other. Suddenly from an inner apartment came a faint moan.

Not a man in the room but what started, their nerves affected by the awful scene.

"What is that?" the detective cried.

There was a rustle of a woman's dress and then, staggering into the parlor, came a strangely beautiful girl.

She was about the medium height, dark-haired and dark-eyed, with a finely-proportioned figure and an exquisite face.

Like one under the influence of a dream she seemed, for she did not appear to know what she was about.

Although the room was brilliantly lighted she came with outstretched hands, as though groping her way in the dark, and after getting into the room she stumbled and fell, just as if she hadn't any control over her limbs.

"It is Miss Wolf!" the detective exclaimed, as he sprung forward to her assistance.

He seized the girl and placed her upon the lounge.

Upon a table near was a water-bottle, and the detective sprinkled the face of the sufferer with the liquid.

"Great heavens! I fear there has been a double attempt at suicide here!" the doctor declared. "Look at her eyes—see how they are dilated! She is surely suffering under the influence of some drug!"

Then the German hurriedly drew a small medicine-case from his pocket, got out a vial and applied it to the nostrils of the almost helpless girl.

Soon she felt the effects of the powerful restorative, for her breathing became more easy, and, with the doctor's assistance, she half-rose.

"Aha! I think there is some chance for life here!" the physician exclaimed.

He selected another vial.

"Drink, my dear madam, drink!" he said in a coaxing way, as he placed the bottle to her lips.

She was passive and the doctor succeeded in getting her to swallow a few drops.

The stimulant revived her, and her head rose from the doctor's shoulder.

With a vacant stare she gazed around the room.

"Where am I? What does this mean?" she asked, so faint as hardly to be able to speak.

"In your own apartment," responded the detective, with an expressive glance at the rest as much as to say, her mind is wandering.

Then she saw the dead man and she shivered with horror.

"Oh, what a dreadful sight!" she murmured.

"Compose yourself, and tell us how your husband came to commit this awful deed, Mrs. Wolf?" the detective said.

"He is not my husband! My name is not Wolf!" she exclaimed, convulsively.

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE STORY.

THE detective glanced at the others and shook his head, as much as to say that he did not consider the girl to be in possession of her senses.

"My dear madam, pray try to compose yourself," he said, soothingly. "I am aware that this is a dreadful shock, but you must endeavor to bear up under it."

"I am very weak and have an odd feeling in my head, but am getting better," the girl responded, slowly.

"Are you strong enough to give us any information in regard to this tragedy?" the detective asked.

"I do not know anything about it," she replied at once, evidently getting stronger.

"Did your husband say anything to lead you to suppose that he meditated suicide?" the detective questioned.

"I have no husband—I am not married!" she exclaimed, looking up in the face of the detective in an amazed way.

"Ah, yes—I mean, did Mr. Wolf say anything in regard to taking his own life?" the detective continued, speaking soothingly, as he would have addressed a timid child.

"I don't know anything about it," she answered. "I do not know any Mr. Wolf."

The men looked at each other.

The girl was still weak, but she seemed to be in possession of her senses.

"My dear madam, try and collect yourself!" the detective exclaimed.

"Are you conscious of what you are saying?" he continued.

"Oh, yes, I know now what I am about," she replied. "I feel sick and weak, but that is on account of the cruel treatment to which I have been subjected."

"By Mr. Wolf?" the detective inquired, eagerly.

"I don't know," the girl replied, shaking her head in a doubtful way. "It is not possible for me to say."

"My dear madam, will you have the goodness to explain?" the detective exclaimed. "Surely you will be able to throw some light upon this dark mystery?"

"Oh, no, I do not know anything at all about it."

"My dear madam, try and recollect—give us the full particulars," the law-agent urged. "At what time did your husband come home, and what happened after he did come?"

"Why will you not believe me when I tell you that I do not know anything about it?" the girl exclaimed, apparently much surprised.

"I am not married—this gentleman is not my husband, and until I saw him just now I never beheld him."

The detective was amazed, while the others looked on with the greatest interest, for none of them had ever witnessed a much stranger scene.

"My dear madam, you surely are not in possession of your senses or else you would not make such a strange statement!" the detective declared.

"I know that you are Mrs. Wolf, for I saw you with your husband a couple of days ago, and happening afterward to meet him alone, I bantered him about the good-looking young lady whom he was escorting, and he told me that you were his new-made wife."

The girl looked at the man in a way which seemed to imply that she thought he must be out of his senses.

"How can you say such a thing as that?" she exclaimed. "I never saw you before in my life, and you could not have seen me, for I only arrived this evening in New York, coming from Tacoma, Washington."

It was now the detective's turn to look amazed.

"Well, I may be mistaken about the matter, of course," he admitted. "I only saw you once, and you had your hat and veil on, which, naturally, made you look a little different from what you do now; still, I fancied I recognized you, and, most certainly, if you are not Mrs. Wolf you bear a wonderful resemblance to her."

"I am not, nor do I know anything about her," the girl replied, positively.

"But, if you are not acquainted with either Mr. or Mrs. Wolf, how comes it that you are here in their apartments?"

"Because I have been the victim of a designing woman."

All listened eagerly to these words, wondering what was to come next.

"Have the kindness to explain. I am a detective officer and have taken charge of this case."

"My story is a very simple one," the girl began. "My name is Milicent Thorwood, and before coming to this city I resided in Tacoma, Washington."

"I am a stranger here, having never been in New York before, and when, on the cars, I made the acquaintance of an elderly lady, who said she knew all about New York and could take me to a nice place where I would be comfortable, I thought myself very fortunate."

"The lady brought me to this house, conducted me up-stairs, and we entered these apartments."

"They were in darkness, and she bade me stand still until she lit the gas."

"Then I was suddenly seized by strong hands, a gag forced into my mouth so I could not cry out, a wet sponge saturated with some pungent-smelling liquid applied to my nostrils, and I relapsed into insensibility from which I recovered but a few moments ago."

"Hearing the sound of your voices, I came into the room, and the rest you know."

The hearers looked at each other in wonder, hardly knowing what to make of so strange a tale.

The detective's suspicions were excited.

In his opinion there wasn't any truth in this story.

She was Mrs. Wolf, and either her head had been affected by what she had taken—the detective thought this was a double suicide case—or else there had been some foul play in the matter, and the story was told to throw the police off the track.

Whatever the truth might be, there wasn't anything to be gained by discussing the matter with the girl in the detective's opinion, and so he cut short the conversation by saying:

"I shall have to ask you to come to Headquarters with me, for it will be necessary for you to see the superintendent about this matter."

"Yes, I will go," the girl replied, seemingly not in the least flurried at the prospect of an

interview with the redoubtable head of the New York police force.

"My hat must be in the other room, for I had it on when I came in."

She essayed to rise, but was so weak as to be obliged to lean on the doctor's arm.

The hat was found and then Detective Mack—so he was called—directed Policeman Maguire to escort the lady to the street, get a coach and wait until he came.

The girl went with the policeman without a word of remonstrance.

"Now we will see what we can discover about this affair," the detective remarked. "Keep your eyes open, gentlemen, for it is likely you will be summoned as witnesses."

"By the way, you are a doctor?" he said to the blonde-haired gentleman.

"Yes, sir, Everhard Grolance, of Fifty-ninth street," and he handed the detective his card.

"That is fortunate, for you will be able to be of assistance in getting at the heart of this mystery."

"It will not be possible to tell accurately until a regular examination is made, but I should certainly judge that it was a case of suicide," the doctor stated.

He knelt by the side of the dead man, inspected him carefully, and then the doctor smelt of the vial which had been in the dead man's grip, Old Sunflower watching him closely.

"Morphia, I think," he observed. "But look! the label has been carefully removed from the bottle so that it is impossible to tell what it contained or where it was bought."

"Yes, I see," the detective said. "You think it pretty certain that the man committed suicide?"

"Oh, yes, I should say so, undoubtedly!" the doctor replied.

Then the detective and the policeman made a careful search of the apartments, but nothing was discovered calculated to throw any light upon the mystery.

"It is a coroner's case now," Detective Mack remarked. "If you will be kind enough to give me your names and addresses, gentlemen, so the coroner can summon you."

The doctor and Old Sunflower complied.

"You were summoned about nine o'clock, doctor?" the detective questioned.

"Yes, an urgent call, but as I was out I did not attend to it until about eleven."

"How long do you suppose the man has been dead?" Detective Mack asked, taking out his memorandum-book and making some entries in it.

"From an hour to two hours. I should imagine."

"The message to you, then, must have been sent at just about the time that he took the poison?"

"Yes, I should say so."

"It looks as if after the dose was taken a doctor was summoned so that some antidote might be given."

"It certainly does."

"And now the next question is, do you know who brought the summons?"

"No, I do not. The call was written on my slate, which hangs on my office door. My practice at present is not large enough to warrant me in having an assistant, so when I go out I leave the slate."

"Ah, yes, I see; and in what kind of a hand was the message written, large or small—a man's or a woman's?"

"Well, really, I did not take any particular notice of it, but, if I remember rightly, it was rather a scrawly one, such as a messenger-boy would be apt to write, and all it said was 'Hurry to Mr. Wolf, Ben Hamet Flats.'"

"How did you fix the time the message was written—you think about nine—if you did not return until eleven?" asked the detective, shrewdly.

"From the gentleman from whom I rent my office; he said he noticed the writing on the slate a few minutes past nine."

"Ah, yes; is the writing still on the slate?"

"No, it is my custom to rub a message out when I set out to answer it, so as to leave the slate blank for another call."

"No hope of getting a clew to the writer then by means of the slate."

Then the detective turned to the Westerner.

"Were you seeking Mr. Wolf on a matter of business?"

"Wa-al, yes; I'm from the West, ye see, and I have got an all-fired big pair of steers, weight over two thousand apiece, and I reckoned that I might get Mr. Wolf to go in with me to exhibit them," Old Sunflower explained.

The detective smiled at the guileless innocence of the stranger.

"Hold yourself in readiness for the coroner to-morrow," he said, and then they departed.

CHAPTER VI.

AT HEADQUARTERS.

WHEN Detective Mack arrived in the street he dismissed the policeman and rode in the hack to Police Headquarters with his prisoner.

As it happened, the chief of police had had some important business on hand that particular

evening, and so he was at his desk when the detective arrived.

The chief listened attentively to the strange tale.

"A very mysterious case," he remarked. "And what the mischief possesses the girl to lie about the matter? You feel pretty certain, by the way, that this is the girl you saw with Wolf, and whom he said was his wife?"

"Well, yes, I think she is the same one," the detective replied, slowly. "But I will admit that I may be mistaken in regard to the matter. I only saw her once, then it was in the street with her hat and veil on. I noticed that she was a pretty girl with dark hair and eyes, quite stylish, and I wondered at the time how Wolf managed to pick her up."

"Let me see: Wolf, if I remember him rightly, was a man of fifty, not particularly good-looking, rather inclined to be fast, and a hard drinker?"

"Yes, he comes of a good family and inherited a big lot of money when his father died. Old Wolf was one of Astor's men and made a mint of money in the fur trade."

"There were only two children, this Wolf and a sister who married Robert Bruce Macfarland, the great Southern railway king."

"Oh, yes, Mrs. Macfarland!" the chief exclaimed. "I know all about her. When her husband died he left about ten million of dollars, and as she had two or three million of her own she was pretty well fixed."

"Yes, Wolf ran through his money over ten years ago, and his sister has allowed him a regular income; his law business never amounted to anything, you know," the detective remarked. "He kept an office down-town, and a boy to attend to it, but I don't believe he took enough money to pay the boy, to say nothing of the other expenses."

"I presume his sister was liberal so he was not cramped for funds," the chief observed, musingly.

"So I have always understood."

"Then he did not commit suicide on account of being short of money?"

"No, he had a roll of a couple of hundred in his pocket, a costly gold watch and chain, a diamond pin worth four or five hundred, so that he was not suffering in that respect."

"Do you suppose that it can be possible that he could have become mixed up in any disgraceful affair, and, fearing exposure, took refuge in death?"

"I do not think so; he was not that kind of a man; he was a hard drinker, but that was about the only weakness I knew him to be guilty of."

"Apparently, then, there was absolutely no reason why he should take his own life."

"Not the slightest reason as far as I can see at present."

"A man of the Wolf stamp does not commit suicide without a good and sufficient cause, and if we cannot discover the reason, then the case appears to look a little like a murder."

"I have my suspicions excited in that direction!" the detective declared.

"A very mysterious circumstance is the summoning of the doctor," he continued. "Of course, to-night we did not have much chance to go into the case, but if we don't run across the messenger to-morrow, it will be mighty strange."

"It certainly will. But if there has been foul play in this matter—if Wolf was murdered—who committed the deed, and what was the motive?"

"Ah, you are too much for me at present, chief; I have not got far enough in the case yet to make any predictions, but I will say, though, that if there is anything wrong about the matter, it is my opinion that this woman knows something about it."

"I will put her through a cross-examination and see what I can get out of her," the chief said.

The girl was then introduced, and in response to the chief's questions she told precisely the same tale that she had given to the detective.

The chief was puzzled.

Never in all his experience had he met with such a case as this. If the story was a false one, then the girl was the most excellent actress that had ever appeared in the Mulberry street building.

"On account of the peculiar circumstances attending this case, I shall have to detain you in custody for a while," the chief explained.

"If it is the law, I must submit, of course," the girl remarked, apparently not at all alarmed or uneasy.

"I will consign you to the care of the matron," the chief remarked. "You will have to submit to be searched, as that is one of our rules."

"I have no objection, but I have some private papers which I should not care to have made public—" she said, hesitatingly.

"Oh, that is all right, my dear young lady," the chief remarked. "You may rest assured that nothing shall be done in that way without your permission."

"It is a mere form," he continued. "And

all the articles you possessed will be restored to you."

"Very well, I am satisfied."

The girl was then consigned to the care of the matron, and the searching process took place.

"I have in my bosom an envelope containing some important papers," the girl said to the matron, after the woman had inspected her pockets.

"You had better allow me to look at them," the woman remarked, in a mild, persuasive way.

"I do not wish to pry into your secrets, you understand," she continued. "All I wish to do is to examine the papers so as to see of what they consist, as I have to make a report about all such things."

"Very well," the girl replied, evidently not disposed to make any trouble.

She drew out the envelope and handed it to the matron.

It was a common, stout, brown one, such as is used for business documents.

"There are only some letters in here addressed to Laura, and in a man's hand," the matron said.

"Oh, no; you have made some mistake!" the girl exclaimed, her face expressing great surprise.

"Indeed I have not," the woman replied, positively. "Your name is Laura, I suppose?"

"Oh, no; I am called Milicent! Let me look at the letters, please."

They were handed to her, and she examined the notes with the air of one who had never seen them before.

"Oh, this is terrible!" she exclaimed. "And I understand all about it now. I have been the victim of a dreadful plot! I was decoyed to that house and drugged so that I might be robbed of my valuable papers."

The matron did not know what to make of it. "You are quite sure that these are not your letters?" she asked.

"Yes; I never saw them before. They are signed Udolpho, and I never knew any gentleman by that name."

The matron searched the girl with the expertness due to long experience, but the letters were all she found.

"I suppose you will have to show them to the chief," she said.

"Oh, yes; I haven't any objection; they do not belong to me; but isn't it dreadful to think that all my valuable papers should have been stolen?" the girl exclaimed, evidently much distressed.

"Well, you had better tell the chief all about it," the matron counseled. "It may be possible that he will be able to recover them for you."

Milicent was then conducted to the presence of the chief again, and the matron made her statement.

The official examined the letters. Then he handed them to the detective, and after he looked at them the two exchanged meaning glances.

"Don't you know anything about these letters?" the chief asked.

"No, sir; I do not."

"Yet you had them concealed."

"Yes, sir; but I had no idea that they were in the envelope. My own papers must have been taken out while I was insensible and these put in their place."

"What were the papers you lost?"

"The record of my baptism, my mother's marriage-certificate, and a sworn statement of the person who has had charge of me during my childhood."

"Ah, yes, I see; these papers would be valuable in case you should find it necessary to legally prove who you were," the chief observed, reflectively.

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any reason why any one should wish to deprive you of these proofs?"

"I do not know, sir; but, pray, do not ask me to explain further, for I think it is to my interest to keep my affairs to myself."

She spoke in such a gentle, ladylike way that the official was decidedly impressed.

"That is all right! I shall not attempt to pry into your private affairs," he declared. "All I am after is to get at the truth concerning this mysterious death."

"You declare that you don't know anything about this Mr. Wolf?"

"Yes, sir, I do not."

"You must be aware that the story you tell in regard to being taken to his apartments and there drugged and robbed, is a very strange one, particularly as this gentleman"—and he nodded to the detective—"feels almost certain that you are the woman whom Mr. Wolf said was his wife, and then the letters found on you, were written by Mr. Wolf—his first name was Udolpho."

"I understand that my story does not appear to be probable but it is the truth!" the girl declared, firmly.

"Well, it is a very mysterious case, but in time, of course, we shall arrive at the truth," the chief remarked.

"We shall require you as a witness, and as you are a stranger in the city we shall have to

send you to the House of Detention for the present. You will be well taken care of there and need not worry at all."

Either the girl was of a remarkably phlegmatic disposition, or else she was so dazed by the drug which had been administered to her, as not to clearly comprehend her situation, for she simply bowed her head and said:

"Very well; I am content."

After she departed the chief asked the detective's opinion.

"Well, really, I am all at sea!" the man-hunter declared.

"There is hardly a doubt in my mind that this is Mrs. Wolf, but why the dickens she tells this yarn about being somebody else is too much for me."

"Unless her brains are affected," the chief remarked. "She doesn't seem to be quite right."

It is either an attempt at a double suicide, or else she is guilty of Wolf's death and is trying to avoid suspicion."

"A very complex case!" was the chief's comment.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INQUEST.

ON the morning after the tragedy, all the newspapers contained full accounts of the mysterious affair, and speculation was on tiptoe.

The coroner took charge of the case and the crowd of curious spectators was so great that the police had all they could do to maintain order.

The detective, the policeman, the doctor and Old Sunflower all gave their testimony and then Miss Thorwood, as she persisted in calling herself, took the stand.

And after she had finished, the coroner, who evidently had his suspicions in regard to her, began a vigorous cross-examination.

"Your name, you say, is Milicent Thorwood?"

"So I am called," the girl responded in her low, sweet voice.

She appeared to much better advantage now than on the previous night, for the effects of the drug had passed away.

"How is it that Detective Mack recognizes you as Mrs. Wolf?"

"He has made a mistake," was the calm and confident answer.

Then the elevator boy and doorman of the Ben Hamet Flats followed one another on the stand.

Both testified that they had seen Mrs. Wolf in company with Mr. Wolf, three or four times—not more, for Wolf had only taken up his quarters in the flats a couple of days before, and although they had not particularly noticed the lady, yet, to the best of their belief, this present lady was Mrs. Wolf.

Then the doorman was questioned in regard to the story that the young woman told about being taken into the flat by an aged lady, and he said he did not remember seeing the pair pass him on the night in question, but he admitted that if they had a key and came in without troubling him to open the door, it was very probable he would not have noticed them.

Then came the surprise of the investigation, a shock which sent an electric thrill through all present.

A middle-aged German elbowed his way to the coroner.

"Mr. Coroner, I wish to give my testimony in this case!" he cried. "I am a druggist, and I think the bottle of morphia found on the dead man came from my establishment."

The declaration created a decided sensation.

The gentleman was immediately placed upon the stand and sworn.

He testified that he kept a drug-store on Third avenue, and, as he had a deal of real estate business to call for his attention, he left the store mainly to the care of his clerk.

Lately though he became dissatisfied with the manner in which the clerk attended to the business.

He seemed careless and neglectful, and the proprietor got the idea that he was becoming dissipated, so he set out to watch him.

On the previous evening, while standing outside of the store conversing with some friends, he noticed the clerk busy in conversation with a young woman who was closely veiled.

The clerk put up a vial of medicine for the woman, she paid and departed, but she hurried away in such a suspicious manner that the druggist felt impelled to go into the store and ask in regard to her purchase.

As he entered, he saw that the clerk had the morphia bottle down, and a vial which had stood on the shelf was gone.

The vial had a peculiar flaw in the glass at one side, and the druggist had had his attention called to the flaw by the clerk.

The following was the conversation sworn to by the witness:

Druggist—"Great heavens! you didn't sell that woman morphia?"

Clerk (carelessly)—"Only a couple of ounces, and I charged her double because she didn't have a prescription."

Druggist—"Don't you know that you haven't any right to sell poison?"

Clerk—"Oh, that is all correct! She is a morphia fiend and knows just how to take it. She could get a prescription easily enough, only her doctor is away on a difficult case and is not expected home until late to-night."

Druggist—"How do you know that she doesn't want the drug for some bad purpose?"

Clerk—"Oh, no; you are too skeery, anyway!"

And then the two had words, ending with the clerk demanding his wages and quitting work, but where he had gone the German knew not.

"Did you ever see this vial before?" asked the coroner, holding up the one which had been found in the hand of the dead man.

And now that attention had been called to the flaw in the glass it was plainly visible.

"Yes, sir; that was the bottle in which my clerk sold the morphia to the woman," the German replied.

"You are positive in regard to this?"

"I am."

"Do you think you would be able to recognize the woman to whom the morphia was sold if you should see her again?"

"I do."

"Look around you. Do you see her in this room?"

"Yes, sir."

"Point her out."

"To the best of my knowledge and belief, that is the lady!" the German declared, with upraised finger indicating Miss Thorwood.

"No, no, no!" the girl cried. "The gentleman is mistaken—I am not the woman!"

Excitement was at fever heat.

The German looked earnestly at the protesting girl, and then he shook his gray head.

"I do not want to make trouble for any one," he declared. "I am an honest man, and though I say that the lady looks to me to be the exact image of the one to whom my clerk sold the bottle of morphia, yet it is possible that I have made a mistake in the matter, for, as she was closely veiled, I did not get a good view of her face."

"But to the best of your knowledge and belief she is the one?" the coroner questioned.

"Yes, sir."

That ended his testimony, and then the doctors made their report.

Wolf had died of poison, and had taken enough morphia to kill a dozen men.

The coroner's jury were not long in rendering a verdict.

Udolpho Wolf had been murdered, and Mrs. Udolpho Wolf, alias Milicent Thorwood, was the doer of the deed.

"I am innocent—I am innocent!" the girl cried, and then fainted dead away.

The room was thrown into confusion as the officers removed the helpless girl.

In the bustle Old Sunflower stepped upon the toes of a well-built, handsome fellow of five-and-twenty, and immediately began to apologize.

"Don't mention it—it is all right!" the young man declared. "I never felt you, but I am in such a fever I don't believe I can feel anything. Did you ever see such an outrage?"

"Hey? what do you mean?"

"This accusation against that poor girl! It is infamous! There is really not a bit of actual proof. I am a lawyer and know what I am talking about!"

"Shake!" cried Old Sunflower, tersely, holding out his big hand.

The two clasped palms.

"Aha! you think as I do?" the young fellow cried.

"Oh, yes, that gal ain't the kind of stuff of which murderers are made!"

"The jury has been carried away by a hurrah, as the saying is, and the coroner is an ignorant, bumptious donkey, who is anxious to pose as a great man," the young man remarked, heatedly.

"I reckon he has got a bad attack of the big head."

"Really the only point against the girl is the evidence of the druggist," the other continued.

"And any man who has any knowledge of this identification business understands that there are a terrible lot of blunders made by people identifying other people."

"Oh, yes, the papers are full on 'em!"

"The man only saw the woman once, by night, and she was closely veiled, and he admits that he did not get a good look at her. The coroner should have tried the police dodge—place the girl with a dozen other women of about her age and then let the druggist pick her out."

"The odds ar' 'bout a thousand to one that he couldn't have done it to save his gizzard!" Old Sunflower declared.

"I have never done much in the criminal line, but I will be hanged if I don't take up the case of this girl, unless some lawyer who is more experienced, and abler than myself, comes to the rescue."

"Wal, I dunno 'bout that," Old Sunflower remarked with a shake of the head. "This hyer gal is in this hyer big city, friendless and alone,

and, as a rule, I reckon big lawyers ain't anxious to rush forward to defend unfortunate people who haven't got the money to pay for the service."

"That is very true, but in a case of this kind, where the trial is certain to be reported at length in the newspapers, some of the noted criminal lawyers will often volunteer their services, even when they know that they do not stand any chance of getting any money out of the affair."

"They secure notoriety and gain a lot of free advertising which to them is just as good as money."

"Sart'in! thar ain't no discount on that."

"If any good man comes forward I am willing to allow him to go ahead," the young man remarked. "But I think I will offer my services anyway to the girl, so that she will feel that she is not altogether friendless."

"I would, and darn me if I wouldn't like to chip in with you in this hyer game, by gum!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"I'm from the wild and woolly West, you understand, young man, and though I am rough and tough and as hard as an old be-b'ar, yet I have got the rocks, and I don't mind putting up a few ov 'em for to see this hyer gal through!"

"I don't lack for funds, thank Heaven!" the other exclaimed. "If I depended upon my practice, though, I might," he added with a grimace. "But I will be glad to have your assistance in this matter, not on account of your money, but because there is something about you that makes me think you would be the right kind of a man to stand by a friend in trouble."

"You kin bet yer life on that, young man, and you'd win the trick, every time!" Old Sunflower declared.

Again the two shook hands.

"My name is Egbert Kingswell, and here is my card."

The Westerner pocketed it.

"My handle is Jonathan Flowers, but for short everybody calls me Old Sunflower, and I am a gay gopher from Bitter Creek!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VALET SPEAKS.

THE young lawyer laughed, for he saw that he had in this strange way made the acquaintance of a decided character.

"Well, I think that you and I together will be able to help the young lady," Kingswell remarked. "At present she seems to be in a pretty bad way, but it is always darkest before the dawn."

"Thar is a heap of sense in that 'ar saying," the Westerner remarked, with a ponderous shake of his big head.

"As it happens I am well acquainted with a certain prominent politician, who is on most excellent terms with the warden of the Tombs, that is our city prison, you know, where the girl will be confined."

"I reckon I have heard of that place," Old Sunflower remarked.

"I ain't altogether such a durned fool of a greenhorn as I look," the Westerner continued.

"The warden is under particular obligations to this party of whom I speak, and the politician is in my debt for favors received, so he will be glad of a chance to do me a kindness, and through him I can arrange an interview with the young lady."

"In a matter of this kind I think it is wise to take time by the forelock and go ahead as fast as possible."

"Sart'in, sart'in! That is true, as sure as you are born! Strike while the iron is hot! That is the game to play every time."

"Suppose you meet me at my office at three this afternoon," the young lawyer suggested. "That will give me time to hunt up my politician friend and arrange for the admission to the prison."

"I will be on hand! You kin depend upon me!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"All right!" Kingswell responded.

Then the two parted.

They had made their way to the door, and were on the threshold when they separated.

There was a tug at the Westerner's sleeve.

He turned, and at his side was the sleek-faced Englishman, whom he had seen in Wolf's office, and who had proclaimed himself to be a gentleman's gentleman.

"Ar'n't you the party that called at the hoffice and was so blooming anxious to find hout 'bout Mr. Wolf?" the Englishman asked.

"I am the man."

"Ham I wrong in thinking that you took considerable hinterest in Mr. Wolf?"

"No, you are right in so supposing."

"Do you take hany hinterest in Mr. Wolf now that he is done for?" the man asked, speaking in a peculiar way, lowering his tone and glancing around as though he wished to be certain that his words could not be overheard.

The reader doubtless understands by this time that Old Sunflower was remarkably quick of apprehension, despite the fact that he appeared to be nothing but an innocent countryman from the wilds of the West.

He understood immediately that the English-

man wished to convey the idea he had something of importance to communicate.

Old Sunflower was quick to jump at the chance to secure information.

He had formed the opinion that the Englishman was a shrewd fellow, and he believed anything he might have to say would be well worth heeding.

"Oh, yes, jest about as much interest as I did when he was living."

"In that case then I think I may be able to say something that will be hinteresting to you," the Englishman remarked, still speaking in a mysterious, guarded way.

"I shall be glad to hear it, and if what you have to say is of any value to me you can depend upon my paying liberally, for that is the kind of a harpin I am!" Old Sunflower declared.

"This 'ere ar'n't the right kind of a place to do any talking," the Englishman remarked.

"You are right, and we had better get out."

"A couple of blocks down the street there is an English chop-house," the other remarked.

"I know all the lads there, and we can 'ave a snug corner all to hourseelves, where we can do our talking without any danger of anybody 'earing what we say."

"That will suit furst-rate!" the Westerner declared. "Suppose we go thar, right away!"

"Hi ham agreeable," the Englishman replied.

Five minutes later the two were in the ale-house, seated in a back corner of an inner room, which they had all to themselves, with mugs of English ale before them.

"Now, then, this is what Hi call cozy and comfortable!" the valet declared.

"Ah, yes, this will answer our purpose nicely."

"I don't know as I ought to bother my 'e'd about this 'ere thing," the Englishman said in a reflective way.

"Maybe if I 'ad stopped to think the matter over I shouldn't, but I spoke to you on the spur of the moment, ye know, and I ham one of them kind of chaps who, when they once get into a thing, believe in going hon with hit."

"Yes, I understand. Pretty good rule as a general thing, I reckon."

"Now, you hare a blooming strange kind of a man, you know!" the Englishman exclaimed in a sudden outburst of frankness.

"Most people would be apt to think you was no end of a duffer, but I flatter myself that I 'ave been long enough in this world to cut my heye-teeth, and when I run across a long-headed man with a lot of brains in his noddle, Hi ham just the cove to spot 'im!"

"Much obliged to you for the compliment," Old Sunflower remarked with a grin.

"When a man goes in to soft-soap me, I generally say to myself, 'Old hoss, you must keep your eyes peeled 'cos this hyar cuss ain't a-doing this for nothing.'"

"I see I didn't make any mistake about your being hup to the time o' day!" the other declared, it now being his turn to grin.

"But Hi ham going to be 'onest with you in this 'ere matter, so help me Bob!" he continued.

"I ain't got no call for to soft-sawder you, and though you do look to be about as green as grass, hit his my opinion that the man what picks you hup for a flat will be most beautifully sold."

"Mebbe, mebbe!" Old Sunflower remarked in a meditative way; "that is one of those things which you have to try on to find out."

"I am game to tell you what my opinion is, right hout and hout!" the Englishman exclaimed. "Hi think you are the kind of man who his hup to snuff, and who knows enough for to play trumps when 'e thinks the trick is worth hit!"

"Wal, that is jest the kind of an old he-b'ar I have allers considered myself to be!"

"Now, about this 'ere thing," the Englishman remarked, in a slow, deliberate way. "I was with Mr. Wolf for about a year; 'e paid me good wages and treated me well, but I got through with 'im about a week ago. If I 'adn't, maybe this 'ere affair wouldn't 'ave 'appened as it did."

The Westerner nodded assent.

"I 'appened to be in Mr. Wolf's hoffice the day you called just by haccident, 'aving run hin for to see hif there were hany letters for me."

"Yes, I understand."

"And when you went to work so promptly for to find hout where Mr. Wolf was, I said to myself, said I—

"This 'ere man is no greenhorn, though 'e does wear queer togs and talks like a countryman who 'ad never been out of sight of green fields in 'is life."

"When a cuss wants informatcn, the quickest way for him to get it is to show he is ready to put up the ducats."

"Guv'nor, you never said a truer thing in your life!" the other declared. "And it was just that way of doing business that made me take the notion into my noddle to speak to you about this 'ere case."

"But, first and foremost, I must introduce myself to you, so that you will hunderstand just how the land lies."

"Ah, yes; it wouldn't be a bad idea for you to go ahead on that tack," Old Sunflower ob-

served. "And you ought to know too who I am, so you will know who it is you are doing business with," he continued.

The Englishman nodded assent.

"My name is Flowers—Jonathan Flowers, and I run a big cattle-ranch at Bitter Creek, Montana; that is away off in the land of sun-down, you comprehend."

"I supposed you were from the West, from the go-a-head way, as you Americans say, that you 'ad of doing business."

"We Western men are all rustlers from 'way-back, and we don't let the grass grow under our feet if we know ourselves!"

"Mr. Flowers, I am 'appy to make your acquaintance, and I 'opes I will be able to give you some hinteresting hinformation."

"Sail in!"

"My name his Joseph Grimshaw, generally called Joey for short, and I claim to be a first-class gentleman's gentleman, a valet, you understand."

"I 'ave 'ad the 'onor of serving some of the best men in the hold country, and was imported across the 'erring pond by an American gent."

"This gent was a blooming kind of a swell, you know, but he set the pace too fast—didn't 'ave molasses enough to stand the racket, and 'ad to cut and run to get away from 'is blarsted creditors."

"Then I haccepted a position with Mr. Wolf, who was a goodish sort of a chap, although he was halways in want of cash, for 'e spent every cent he could get 'is 'ands on, like as hif the money was so much water and could be 'ad for the arsking."

"I know he was not a man of wealth, although there was plenty of money in the family."

"Oh, yes; 'is sister, Mrs. Macfarland, the widow of the great railway king, is just a-rolling in money, they say."

"So I understood."

"And from this sister Mr. Wolf got his cash, but she didn't pony up 'alf as fast as 'e would have liked 'er to 'ave done."

"The trouble with my master was that 'e was very fond of the flowing bowl," the valet continued. "And a man who drinks like a fish, and goes in for champagne and brandy, turning hup his nose at common liquors, can get rid of a deal of money in a short time."

"I believe you!" Old Sunflower exclaimed with a wise shake of his head.

"And the blarsted drink is just what has laid Mr. Wolf low!" the Englishman declared.

"I see; he indulged to excess, and when his money was all gone he became desperate and committed suicide."

"Oh, no, you are all hout there!"

"How so?"

"Mr. Wolf didn't take 'is hown life—not a bit of hit!" Grimshaw declared in the most positive manner.

"How did he come to die—do you believe that the jury were right when they declared he was murdered?"

"I ham sure of it!" the Englishman replied.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS.

"AHA! you are, hey?" Old Sunflower declared, deeply interested.

"Yes, sir, I ham sure of hit!" the valet repeated, firmly.

"I have a suspicion that you are not going entirely upon the evidence that was brought out at the inquest to-day."

"You are right for a thousand p'un's!" the Englishman replied.

"I ham not going hupon what I 'eard to-day at all."

"You have your information from another source?"

"Exactly."

"And you propose to reveal it to me?"

"Yes, because I think you are the kind of man who may be able to do something with hit."

"Hi ham a downy man of the world, you know," the Englishman continued. "I 'ave been through a great many hups and downs, and, as I said, hi got my eye teeth cut a long while ago, but for all that I 'ave a humar 'eart in my body and when I know that Mr. Wolf was murdered—a chap who halways treated me well—it goes against my conscience to sail away for hold England, as I hintend to do the last of the week, without making an attempt to put somebody hup to the time o' day."

"I can understand the feeling."

"I was his 'own man, you know, and gentlemen can't keep much from their hown men, particularly when they are chaps who are fond of their booze and get full every now and then."

"When the liquor is in the wit is out."

"Yes, sir, you 'ave hit to a certainty!" the other declared.

"When Mr. Wolf got hunder the influence of the rosy he 'ad a queer 'abit of talking—not to me, nor anybody else—but to 'imself."

"It is the business of men in my line to keep their hears hopen, for they hoften manage to pick up bits of hinformation which come in 'andy, sometimes."

"Say! if you were aware of anything important concerning this mystery, how is it that you didn't tell the coroner so that you could have been summoned as a witness?" Old Sunflower exclaimed, abruptly.

The Englishman laughed and then winked at the Westerner in a very mysterious way.

"Oh, no, I couldn't do that, you know," he replied.

"Why not?"

"Because there are reasons why I'd better keep shady."

"Oh! excuse my questioning; I don't want to pry into your secrets."

"I suppose you ought to 'ave a 'int as to why I didn't want to come forward, so you will know that I am hacting on the square with you," the Englishman remarked in a reflective way.

"I will take your word for it, and from the way things go I will be able to make out whether everything is all straight or not."

"It will not do any harm to let you 'ave an 'int, if you'll give me your word not to give it away."

"You can depend upon me; although I may seem to have a loose tongue, yet I am no blabber."

"Well, Mr. Flowers, I 'ad the ill-luck to get hinto a nasty scrape a couple of months ago. I was with a party, and we all got too much liquor on board and my pals did some crooked business, but I give you my word I was as innocent as a unborn babe, and 'ad no suspicion of what the other coves were hup to."

"The cops came down on us and we were all juggled."

"The next morning when we were 'auled hup before the beak I 'ad sense enough to give a false name, and 's 'Onor, the beak, seeing as it was our first offense, as none of the cops knew any of us, let the party hoff with a fine."

"Now, you hunderstand if I was to come forward as a witness in this case, the hods are big that some of the reporters would remember me, and then my little scrape would be published to hallow the world."

"Very likely. These reporters are dreadful fellows for finding out what men most desire to keep concealed."

"I am not a-running any risks, you know!" the Englishman declared with a knowing wink.

"Besides, what I 'ave to say isn't really evidence that amounts to anything—that his, I mean the coroner couldn't make much hout of it, but when I put a man like yourself, or a detective, in possession of it, maybe something might be made hout of hit."

"Yes, yes, I comprehend."

"Now then this 'ere yarn of mine is made hup of what I 'eard Mr. Wolf say to himself when he was drunk, and what I know about his affairs."

"I understand, and you are not sure that you hav'n't made some mistake."

"That is it, exactly, but hit his my hidea that I 'ave got it down pretty fine, as you Americans say."

"Go ahead!"

"Mr. Wolf got all his money from 'is sister, Mrs. Macfarland, so much a month, and 'e was always a-grumbling because hit wasn't more."

"The money was paid—not because Mrs. Macfarland cared anything for 'er brother, for she didn't—being one of those stuck-up dames that don't care for nobody but themselves—but because Wolf was in possession of some secret concerning his sister, and she paid him for to keep his mouth shut."

"If this is correct you have given me a mighty important clew!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"When Wolf was so drunk as to want to talk to 'imself, I 'ad 'eard 'im say a 'undred times, 'What! grudge me a paltry hundred dollars a week when, if I choose to speak, I could blast your reputation forever, 'igh as you 'old your 'ead, Gertudge Macfarland!'"

"That looks as if your suspicions were correct," the Westerner remarked.

"And then he would go on and mutter, 'One of these days I will play Samson and pull the whole temple down about our 'eads even though we are involved in one common ruin!'"

"Quite dramatic," Old Sunflower commented.

"It is easy to guess at his meaning, though. If he made this secret public, and ruined Mrs. Macfarland, it would also be bad for him, for then he wouldn't be able to get any more money out of her."

"Of course! It is has plain has the nose on your face!" Grimshaw exclaimed.

"Every time that Wolf got full, he would rip out in this kind of way, and really 'e got to drinking so 'ard that a little hower a month ago I 'ad to give notice because I could really stand 'im no longer."

"'E said 'e was sorry to 'ave me go, but still 'e supposed it would be just as well, as 'e expected to get married in a month or so, and then 'e wouldn't need me."

"I was amazed, because I 'ad no hidea he was thinking of such a thing."

"Then I set to work to find out who the lady was, and why the thing 'ad been kept so quiet."

"Did you succeed?"

"I can't say as I did. It was a very mysteri-

ous affair. The young woman was called Laura, but I couldn't get at 'er last name, and from what I could find out about 'er, she 'ad been an actress or something of that sort."

"Wolf 'ad made her acquaintance by accident, and although 'e was a man of fifty, old enough, you know, not to be entrapped by the first pretty woman who set her cap for him, yet he went hon in a perfectly ridiculous way."

"You think she was some adventuress who went in to snare him for a victim because she thought he had money?" Old Sunflower observed, reflectively.

"Yes, that is the way I figured it hout," the Englishman replied.

"And then, in some mysterious way, which Mr. Wolf could not understand, all the particulars of the affair were brought to Mrs. Macfarland's knowledge, and hit produced a precious row."

"She wanted to know if he intended to disgrace her family, at his time of life, by marrying some nameless beggar whom he had picked hup hin the streets."

"That is the way she put it, you know, just as proud as a peacock, and hif she 'ad the blood of all the 'Owards in her veins she couldn't put on more airs."

"Yes; some of these New York dames of the 400 think they are queens and princesses in their own right," the Westerner observed.

"There was a fearful row. Mr. Wolf swore that he would marry the girl, and 'is sister said hif 'e did she wouldn't give 'im another dollar, and 'e replied that she couldn't 'elp 'erself and would 'ave to give it to 'im."

"That was five nights ago. The next day 'e married the lady and brought 'er to the flat, then 'e went off on a spree to Long Branch, and the rest you know."

Old Sunflower meditated over the tale for a few moments.

Finally he said:

"You were right in thinking that this hyer story would give a clew to a detective."

"Oh, yes, if a good man should take 'old of it he would 'ave something to work upon."

"Well, I don't know whether I would be good or bad in that line, but I have a great notion to try my luck," Old Sunflower declared.

"You see, according to my h'idea the jury was all wrong when they brought in a verdict against Mrs. Wolf," the Englishman remarked.

"That is my thought. I don't see why she should want to kill the man. He was the goose who was to give her golden eggs."

"No reason at all. It was Mrs. Macfarland who 'ad cause to fear 'im."

"And yet it seems very improbable that a woman of that kind would stoop to commit a crime of this sort."

"Well, I really don't know," the other observed with a grave shake of the head. "I 'ave 'ad a deal to do with the nobility, and the gentry, in my time, and I must say as 'ow I 'ave found some rare bad eggs among 'em."

"You take this highflying kind, when they get the bit in their mouth they are hapt to gallop straight to the devil."

"That is true enough," Old Sunflower responded.

"By the way," he continued, abruptly, "did you ever see this Mrs. Wolf before to-day?"

"Once only."

"Wal, is she the woman? She declares she isn't, you know."

"Blessed if I know! When I saw her she 'ad a veil over 'er face, but she looked like this one."

"You wouldn't swear to it, though?"

"No, nor would I swear she wasn't. I didn't have a good enough look at her to decide either one way or the other."

This ended the interview.

Old Sunflower astonished the Englishman by giving him fifty dollars.

"I would 'ave been satisfied with 'alf the money!" Grimshaw declared.

CHAPTER X.

BEARDING THE TIGRESS.

"DURN mel if this ain't as mysterious a case as I ever got my nose into!" Old Sunflower declared as he proceeded down the street.

"The gal is not the gal. She ain't Laura Wolf but Milicent Thorwood."

"I have got hold of one little trick which may count for a point a leetle further on in the game."

"In my pocket, safe and sound, is the signature of Laura Wolf, and a note in her handwriting."

"Now, all I will have to do is to get a few lines of this girl's handwriting to compare with the note and the chances are a good thousand to one that I can settle the question of whether she is the wife or not, right off the reel."

The Westerner meditated over the matter for a moment.

"The gal could block that game by refusing to write," he mused. "But she is hardly likely to do so. It will not be possible for her to suspect that the note is in my possession, but if she will not write it will go far to prove that she is the Laura who wrote the note."

"But I don't take any stock in that at all!" he cried, abruptly.

"No, no! she is telling the truth. She is not the wife, but was decoyed to the flat so that she could be found there when the death was discovered."

"The message for the doctor was designed to bring about the discovery that Wolf was dead. Under the circumstances ninety-nine men out of a hundred would have suspected something was amiss, and think it was his duty to give an alarm; that is certain."

"The thing looks like a plot to fix the murder upon this gal, but that will not be an easy thing to do if she is innocent."

"She can prove that she is not Laura by bringing forward the people with whom she has lived to testify as to who she is."

"Stop a bit though!" Old Sunflower cried, abruptly. "Wolf was married only four days ago, and this girl came from Tacoma, Washington. That is a deuce of a ways off—a long journey, and four days could be easily wasted, or gained, during the trip hither."

"Say the running time between New York and Tacoma is six days—it must be somewhere around that figure, and the girl has taken ten or twelve days to make the trip; it is a long journey and she may have stayed a day or two here and there to rest herself; nothing improbable in a girl not used to traveling doing a thing of that kind."

"Say she declares that it took her twelve days to come from Tacoma here; that would be a likely story, and would bring her in New York on the night of the murder."

"Now, on the other hand, suppose she came straight through in six days, that would give her six days in New York, and if she made Wolf's acquaintance immediately on her arrival and he went in and married her off-hand, she could be Milicent Thorwood in Tacoma and Laura Something-or-other in New York without any trouble; so, even if she proves she did come from Tacoma and was known there as Milicent Thorwood, it doesn't prove that she is not the woman who married Wolf, this Laura who wrote the letter, in New York."

"And the letter sent to him at Long Branch was designed to bring him back to New York so that he might be killed—perhaps!"

"But the motive?"

Old Sunflower shook his head.

"No, no, I am on the wrong track!" he declared. "This girl, even if she is the wife, had no reason to wish him dead, as it was decidedly to her interest he should live."

"But she is telling the truth—she is not the wife, and she was brought to the flats in order to involve the death in as much mystery as possible."

"Where is the wife and why has she disappeared?"

And then the Westerner shook his head.

"Oh, come now! it is too much for me to expect to answer such hard questions as these at this stage of the game. I have not fairly got into the matter, and it is not to be expected."

"Now then, what is the first thing for me to do?"

After he put the question, Old Sunflower meditated over it for a few moments.

"This afternoon I am to see the gal. Hadn't I better go this morning and see what Mrs. Macfarland has to say for herself?"

"As the case now appears it looks as if she had more cause to wish that Udolpho Wolf was out of the world than anybody else."

"He threatened her, probably; if the Englishman has got at the rights of the matter he most certainly did, and she might have calculated that the only way to stop his mouth was to kill him."

"As a rule, people of the Mrs. Macfarland stamp don't try games of that sort, yet they have been known to do it."

"Anyhow, it will not do any harm to have a talk with the lady."

In a drug store he consulted a Directory, ascertained the address of Mrs. Macfarland and set out to visit her.

It was not far away as she resided on Madison avenue in the neighborhood of Fiftieth street.

The house was a stately one and everything about indicated that the occupant was the owner of vast wealth.

"Mebbe I will have difficulty in getting speech with this hyer critter," the Westerner murmured as he ascended the steps.

"Sometimes these big-bugs are terribly hard to get at, but if I put on a good ready mebbe I can do the trick."

The ring at the bell was answered by a big servant, clad in an elaborate livery, and fully impressed with a sense of his own importance.

He glanced full of suspicion at the odd figure of the Westerner.

"Mrs. Macfarland?" exclaimed Old Sunflower in a tone which seemed to indicate that he owned a square mile of New York.

The servant was amazed, and he took another look at the applicant for admission as if he found it difficult to believe that such a voice could come from such a man.

"Mrs. Macfarland?" again ejaculated the Westerner. "I want to see her upon important

business. I'm in the detective line, you understand—this Wolf affair, you know!"

And if the old fellow had been the superintendent of the New York police he could not have spoken in a tone indicative of more authority.

To clinch the matter, too, he chinked a couple of big silver dollars together in his hand in an extremely meaning way.

Under ordinary circumstances the footman would no more thought of admitting such a man to see his mistress than he would have of letting in a common street beggar.

But the way in which Old Sunflower spoke, and the silver dollars, were too much for him.

"Ave the kindness to walk h'in, if you please," he said with a dignified bow.

He was an imported flunkey, for American soil and air are not congenial to the growth of such specimens.

Old Sunflower marched into the parlor as though he owned the entire establishment, transferring the dollars to the footman as he passed.

"Tell the lady that I am in considerable of a hurry as I want to get to Police Headquarters as soon as I can," the Westerner remarked with an air of authority.

"Oh, by the way, my man, mebbe it would be just as well that you should not say to her who I am; women are apt to be a little nervous," he continued as the man turned to depart.

"You can just say a gentleman on important business."

"Yes, sir"

And the footman withdrew, muttering to himself as he passed through the hall that, "of hall the hout and houters" he had ever come across, "this 'ere chap was the cock of the walk!"

The mansion was magnificently furnished, and as Old Sunflower looked around upon the lavish display of luxury he fell to speculating if it could be within the bounds of probability that the owner of such wealth could descend to a vulgar, brutal crime.

He did not have long to meditate, for in a few moments he heard the rustle of a woman's dress and a lady of fifty or thereabouts swept into the room with the air of a queen.

She was tall and finely-proportioned, and it could easily be seen that in her younger days she must have been supremely beautiful.

But she was still a handsome woman, and bore her years gracefully.

That she was proud and haughty could be seen at a glance, for she carried herself with the regal air of a queen.

When she glanced at the Westerner, a look of intense surprise appeared on her proud features, being evidently amazed that such a man had been admitted into her presence.

"Did you wish to see me, sir?" she exclaimed, with contracted brows, looking at Old Sunflower as an empress would survey the humblest of her lackeys.

"Mrs. Macfarland?" said the Westerner, who had risen at the lady's approach, and, as he spoke, saluted her with a polite bow.

"Yes, sir."

"Wal, madam, I reckon I want to see you, then."

"You have made some mistake, my good man, I think," the lady said, in a tone of hauteur. "You surely cannot have any business with me."

"I reckon I have, if you are the lady I take you to be. You are Mrs. Udolpho Wolf's sister?"

"I am," the lady responded, a dark look appearing on her face.

"Then you are the party I want to see, and no mistake," Old Sunflower responded, firmly.

"You are wrong, sir; it is not possible that you can have any business with me, and I must ask you to withdraw," the lady remarked, with an air of cold disdain.

"Madam, I am not the kind of man to make any mistake about a matter of this sort," the Westerner declared, as he coolly seated himself. "I have important business with you, and if you are wise, you will not refuse me a hearing."

"That sounds a little like a threat!" Mrs. Macfarland exclaimed, an angry look appearing on her proud features.

"No, it isn't a threat—it is advice," the Westerner retorted. "I give you my word that I will not detain you long, and I can promise you that what I have to say will be certain to prove of interest to you. I am doing a little detective business, and I want to talk to you about the murder of your brother."

"My brother murdered!" cried the lady, impulsively. "Impossible!"

"Not impossible, but a dead-sure fact!" replied Old Sunflower, sternly.

CHAPTER XI.

A GRAND DAME.

"Oh, no; it is not impossible, for it is the truth!" Old Sunflower responded.

"And, really, you must permit me to shut these doors," he continued. "For servants will

be eavesdroppers, and, in my opinion, the more quiet a matter of this kind is kept, the better it is for all parties concerned."

Then he closed the doors, while the lady gazed upon him in amazement strongly tinged with anger.

"Upon my word, sir, I think you are the most impudent fellow I ever encountered!" she declared, as soon as she could recover from the surprise into which Old Sunflower's action had thrown her.

"Why? because I have taken the liberty to close the doors so that our conversation cannot be overheard by your lackeys?" the Westerner demanded.

"But I have told you, sir, that I do not wish to converse with you!" Mrs. Macfarland exclaimed, with knitted brows. "And it is a mystery to me how my footman could be so far forgetful of his orders as to admit you."

"It wasn't the man's fault. I kinder magnetized him, with a touch of bulldozing thrown in," Old Sunflower explained, with a grin.

"And, madam, I want you to understand that I came to see you on a mighty serious bit of business," he continued, with an entire change of manner.

"I come in the interest of justice. Your brother has been murdered, and I propose to make the doers of the deed answer for their crime."

By this time the lady had in a great measure recovered her composure.

"I presume that the easiest way for me to get rid of you will be to listen to what you have to say; so be seated, sir, and proceed as quickly as possible."

Mrs. Macfarland seated herself in an arm-chair and Old Sunflower resumed the seat from which he had risen.

Fixing her brilliant, imperious eyes full on the face of the Westerner, she said, in a cold and distant way:

"Your announcement that my brother has been murdered was a surprise to me. I read the account of his death, wherein it was stated that he had committed suicide, and I was not particularly amazed, for I have expected something of the kind for years."

"As I presume you have made some inquiries in regard to my brother, and so know something in regard to his life, I shall not hesitate to speak in the frankest manner."

Old Sunflower nodded and assumed a wise look.

It was his game just now to allow the lady to do the talking; in reality he knew very little about the man who had been hurried from the world in so untimely a fashion.

"For over thirty years my brother has been a disgrace to himself and his family," Mrs. Macfarland declared.

"While my father lived he was somewhat kept in check, but since his death he has gone on in his evil way without let or hindrance."

"For years, now, we have been as strangers to each other. After he squandered the wealth that descended to him on his father's death, I allowed him a regular allowance, enough to support him in comfort in the manner in which he had been brought up, but I grieve to say that years did not bring wisdom."

"He squandered his allowance as he threw away his fortune; he was always in debt—always hunted by creditors, anxious for their money, and many of these fellows when they found it was not possible for them to collect their bills of him would try to force their way into my presence, thinking that I was his sister and wealthy, and I would settle the accounts rather than be annoyed."

"Years ago I was foolish enough to pay his debts. A dozen times at least I committed this act of folly, he, on each occasion, promising that he would be more careful in the future."

"Some men can't keep a promise of that kind," the Westerner observed, dryly.

"My brother was one of these men!" she said, with a disdainful curl of her proud lip.

"And at last I grew to understand that, whenever I was favored with a visit from my brother, it meant that he was desperately in need of money and hoped to get it from me, as usual."

"Now, I am not the kind of woman to submit to any such treatment," she declared, and as she compressed her resolute lips, the thought came to the Westerner that, if her face was any indication to her character, she was not the sort of woman to stand any nonsense from anybody.

"I told my brother so, plainly; he resented my frank speech, grew angry, declared I had never treated him like a brother and he hated me."

"My retort was that I did not think enough of him to hate—I simply despised him."

"I have gone into this matter at length, so you will understand that I am but little more affected by the death of my brother than if he had been an utter stranger, and I can assure you, sir, that I take very little interest in the matter."

"If I should frankly give you my opinion, I should be obliged to say that I believe my brother to be as well out of the world as in it, for

he was a disgrace to himself, and to every one that had anything to do with him."

"I am aware that a great many people would think me harsh and cruel, and blame me for thinking in this way, but I am not one of the kind who pays heed to idle talk. I know I am perfectly justified in thinking as I do, and I care nothing for the opinion of the world at large."

"What a magnificent creature this woman is," was the thought in Old Sunflower's mind. "What a general she would have made if she had been a man. A woman of the stuff of which martyrs are composed—those who went with a smile on their lips to the stake and the fire rather than give up the belief which they thought was right."

"As to what the man was when he was alive, I know little, and care less," the Westerner remarked, in his blunt, outspoken way.

"It is my business at present to find out how he came to his death, and that is why I come to you, his nearest relative, thinking that I might be able to get some information which would be of service to me."

"I do not think I can afford you any; still, as I am not well informed in regard to such matters, I may not be right. You are at liberty to question, sir, and if I can give you any information I shall not hesitate to do so," and the proud dame settled herself back in her chair with the air of a woman who had conferred a great favor.

"The coroner's inquest took place this morning, and the verdict was that your brother had been murdered."

Then Old Sunflower related the particulars. Mrs. Macfarland listened with interest.

"It is very strange," she said. "What motive had this new-made wife to murder him?"

"That is a mystery."

"And why does she declare that she is not his wife?"

"Another puzzle, as deep as the first."

"Of course, my brother was an idiot to marry the girl!" the lady declared, scornfully. "And he ought to have known that he could not expect that Heaven would smile upon such a union."

"I understand you were informed before the wedding took place that your brother contemplated such a step, and you had an angry conversation with him in regard to it."

A look of surprise appeared on Mrs. Macfarland's face.

"Yes, it is true," she said, slowly. "But I wonder at your knowing the fact. I presume my wretched brother could not keep his own counsel."

"And your knowledge of this wedding—it came to you in a secret and underhand manner?"

"It did," the lady replied, more and more surprised by the visitor's information.

"Give me the facts, please."

"The intelligence was conveyed to me by an anonymous letter which stated that my brother was about to be married to a miserable girl, who sung in a low concert-saloon where the girls, after singing on the stage, came out and drank liquor with the men in the audience."

"I could not believe that it was true, so I sent for Udolpho immediately and taxed him with the purpose."

"If my brother had one virtue, it was frankness; he never seemed to be ashamed of anything he did, no matter how bad it was."

"And he admitted the truth about the marriage?"

"He did; and rather seemed to glory in it. I was so angry that I told him if he married the vile creature I would never look upon his face again."

"And then he became angry and threatened you, hey?" asked Old Sunflower, sharply.

"It is evident that you are well-informed, sir," Mrs. Macfarland responded, disdainfully.

"You are right he did threaten me, and I ordered him from the house."

"You did not fear his threats?"

"Fear!" and the lady laughed in disdain. "Why should I fear?"

"Your brother, then, was not in possession of any secret concerning you which would bring shame and mortification if published to the world?"

Mrs. Macfarland looked amazed, and for a moment seemed at a loss to reply. Then she replied, rapidly:

"No, sir! A thousand times, no! The thought is a monstrous one!"

"And yet he had the idea that he did possess such a secret," the Westerner remarked. "It was his notion, too, that you allowed him the hundred dollars a month because you wished to bribe him to keep silent."

"The idea is perfectly absurd!" the proud woman declared, the color mounting to her face and her eyes flashing.

"And now that you speak so plainly about this matter, a light breaks in on me," she continued, her brow wrinkled by the lines of thought.

"When we quarreled, he certainly did threaten that, if I withdrew the allowance on account of

his marriage, he would take means to make me bitterly repent it. He would reveal a secret to the world, and then I would be humbled and disgraced.

"He had been drinking at the time, and I formed the opinion that he was so confused with liquor as not to be conscious of what he was saying.

"I cut the speech short by ordering him from the house, and from that time to this I never gave a thought to the matter."

"He was not in possession of any secret, then?"

"Decidedly not! The idea is ridiculous! I gave him the allowance out of charity, so he would not starve; not out of fear!"

"He believed you feared his speaking, though."

"If that is the truth, his brains must have been disordered by his life of dissipation."

"Your late husband was a great railway king; could there be some episode connected with his past life which would bring mortification to you if made public?" the Westerner asked, reflectively.

"Oh, no; I do not think such a thing can be possible!" the lady declared.

"My husband was in public life—had a great many rivals, some of them bitter enemies, and if there had been any shameful secret connected with his early life, some of these foes would certainly have learned the particulars and published them to the world."

"It might be that your brother discovered some secret that was not known to the rest of the world," Old Sunflower suggested.

"Of course it is possible, but, to my thinking, not very probable," the lady replied.

"Even then the disgrace could not fall on me!" she declared, proudly.

"Thank Heaven! I occupy so secure a position that, no matter what my husband may have done before he met me, his actions could not have any effect upon me."

"Have you the letter which gave you the warning about your brother's marriage?"

"No, I burnt it up. I was angry at the moment, and thrust it into the fire after reading it."

"Do you remember the style of the handwriting?"

"Yes, it was evidently written by a man, a back-hand, so called, as if to disguise the writing."

"The object of the letter was to make trouble between you and your brother?"

"Yes, undoubtedly."

"And whoever wrote it must have been in your brother's confidence, or else the facts would not have been known to him."

"That is what puzzled my brother. He declared that no one but himself and the girl knew that they intended to get married. I surmised that the girl was proud of the conquest she had made, and had boasted of the engagement."

"Did he think it was likely?"

"No, he was positive it was not so."

"The disclosure might have been made by some friend of the girl who was afraid that your brother would not marry her after all, and he fancied that if you made trouble about the match, your brother, out of sheer ugliness, would decide to go ahead."

"If that was the plan, it worked to perfection," Mrs. Macfarland remarked, thoughtfully.

"My brother, too, was one of those obstinate men who, when advised not to take a certain course, would be pretty certain to do it."

"Wal, madam, I am much obliged to you," the Westerner observed, rising.

"I can't say that I have gained much by coming, still, when a man goes fishing he must not expect to get a bite every time he drops his line in the water."

"You are a very strange sort of person," Mrs. Macfarland declared, also rising. "If you had not been, you may rest assured you would not have succeeded in gaining this interview with me."

"It takes all sorts of men to make a world. Good-day, madam."

And then Old Sunflower departed.

"Durn the luck!" he exclaimed, as he proceeded down the avenue. "I didn't succeed in getting a clew worth shucks!"

"If there was a secret, the woman would deny it, of course."

"If the secret is all in my eye, then the woman had no reason to wish Wolf out of the way."

"But if there was something in his threats, would his death settle the thing? Did the secret die with him?"

"Durn me if it ain't a puzzle?"

CHAPTER XII.

AN OLD FRIEND.

OLD SUNFLOWER marched on, busy in reflection.

"Not a pint—not a pint yet!" he muttered.

"I'm a-groping in the dark—and what a blamed, durned, Egyptian darkness it is, too; but I will keep on hammering at it, and it will be

mighty funny if I don't strike a streak of light somewhere."

He took his course to Broadway, and went down the busy thoroughfare deep in thought.

But, for all that, he had his eyes about him, and he soon got the idea that he was being followed.

There was a sporting-looking man—a fellow who appeared to the Westerner to be a cross between a prize-fighter and a gambler—who was paying more attention to his movements than a stranger would be apt to do.

"Now, what in thunder is that chap up to?" the Westerner murmured, as soon as he made this discovery.

"He doesn't look like a bunco-man, but that he has got his eyes on me is sart'in."

"Wal, mebbe he will develop his game before long. I shouldn't mind having another run in with these bunco-boys, jest to keep from getting rusty."

There was a group of people gathered before a window where some pictures were displayed, and Old Sunflower stopped for a moment to gaze with the rest.

The stranger took advantage of this fact to advance to his side, so that when the Westerner turned to continue his course he came face-to-face with the man.

"Hello! well, I'm blessed if it isn't you, after all!" the fellow exclaimed, giving a start of surprise and then reaching for Old Sunflower's hand in the most cordial manner.

"Oh, yas; I am hyer, all of me, as large as life, and twice as natural!" the old man exclaimed. "How are ye—how do you find yourself, anyway?"

And Old Sunflower shook hands with the stranger in the warmest manner.

"Oh, I am pretty well—how are you?"

"Alive and kicking—never was better in my life!"

"You are looking hearty, and I don't see that you have changed a bit. Let me see! it must be all of five years since I saw you last."

"Yas, I reckon it must be fully five years."

"In Chicago, wasn't it? or was it in Denver?" asked the stranger.

"Blamed if I know!" Old Sunflower replied.

"I never was any good at remembering things of that kind, anyway."

"Well, it strikes me that it was Chicago, Mr. Flowers."

"Hello, hello! this cuss has got my name pat enough," was the Westerner's thought.

"And strange to say, you know, I was just thinking of you this morning, and wondering where you were, when I happened to go into that coroner's court, and about the first man I saw after I got in was yourself."

"The mouse is out of the meal-tub now," thought Old Sunflower. "This accounts for his having my name at his tongue's end."

"I reckon it is going to turn out to be a leetle bunco business arter all."

"The moment I saw you I felt certain you were my old Western friend, but on account of the crowd I couldn't get a chance to speak to you, but when you gave your evidence I saw I was right, and I intended to hail you after the court got through, but, somehow, I lost sight of you in the crowd."

"Ah, yes, little things of that kind will happen sometimes."

"But I am mighty glad to meet you I tell you!" and again the man shook hands with Old Sunflower, who displayed equal warmth.

"Will you have a drink?"

"Will a duck swim?" exclaimed the Westerner, with a grin.

"There's a nice little saloon around the corner where I often go when I am in this neighborhood, and if you don't mind we will go there."

"Sart'in! I'm agreeable. So long as we ar' going to git good licker it doesn't matter to me whar we go."

"Come on, then!"

"By the way—it's blamed funny, but I can't recall your name to save me!" ejaculated Old Sunflower, abruptly.

"Henry Murphy," responded the other.

"Ah, yes, I know you now!" the Westerner exclaimed, apparently delighted. "Wasn't it blamed queer that I couldn't remember your name, although your face was familiar to me?"

"Well, a man's name is apt to slip you once in awhile, you know."

"That is a fact—you can gamble on that!"

The other looked askance at the Westerner as he blurted out this remark.

It was just as if he thought the other was making a personal allusion.

But there was no guile in Old Sunflower's honest face.

The stranger conducted the Westerner to a small saloon on one of the side streets leading from Broadway, and the moment that Old Sunflower entered the place he comprehended that he was in a "sporting drum."

By this odd name the saloons are known where prize-fighters and their followers congregate.

The walls were adorned with pictures of noted boxers, interspersed with engravings of race-horses and famous yachts.

There were a half a dozen short-haired fellows

in the place, but they were busy conversing together, and paid no heed to the pair when they entered.

Old Sunflower was rather surprised.

"Really now, what kind of a game is this galoot going to ring in on me," he murmured, as his companion passed the time of day with the bartender.

"If this is bunco he is going to try and work the trick in a new way, I reckon," the Westerner mused.

The fellows in the corner had got into a dispute, and were talking pretty loudly.

"There is a private room in the rear," Murphy observed. "And I think we had better go there where we can enjoy quiet and be by ourselves. These fellows are sporting ducks, with horse-racing on the brain, and when they get to j'bbing about their pools and odds they make me tired."

"If they keep on I reckon there will be a fight."

"Ah, no, not much danger of that," the other replied. "Billy, the barkeeper, is a tough lad, and he will not stand any disturbance. If they go too far he will come out with a club and run the whole party into the street."

"He looks as if he could do it," the Westerner commented, with a glance at the muscular man behind the counter.

"We can have the back room to ourselves; it is a nice big room, and in the winter time they put a ring in the middle and use it for boxing exhibitions. This is a great resort for pugilists."

"Yes, I should judge so from the pictures on the walls."

"We will have a bottle wine, for I always feel like celebrating when I meet an old Western friend in New York."

"Sart'in! does kinder make a man feel good to run across an old chum," Old Sunflower observed, and then as the other turned to order the wine, he muttered, under his breath:

"Now then, what is his game, that he can afford to go in after this style?"

"He did not used to work anything of this kind, but he may have got in with new pals, and be up to new tricks."

CHAPTER XIII.

PUTTING ON THE SCREWS.

"GIVE me a bottle of fiz and a couple of glasses, Billy," the sport said to the bartender.

"I will take my friend into the back room where we can have a quiet chat together over old times. This is a man from the West, Billy, who has come on to New York to see the sights, and I am going to take him 'round."

The bartender ducked his head and said that he was pleased to see the gentleman, and hoped he would find it convenient to call in whenever he was in the neighborhood.

Old Sunflower replied that he certainly would, speaking in that jolly, good-natured way so common to him, and the bartender mentally sized him as being a "sucker from Suckerville."

Murphy took the wine and glasses and led the way through a rear door, Old Sunflower following.

The pair traversed a short entry, and then down a pair of stairs to an underground apartment.

A single gas-jet illuminated the passage, or else it would have been in total darkness.

Two doors were passed, and then the couple found themselves in a room about thirty feet square, which was bare of furniture, with the exception of a small table and a couple of chairs which were in the center of the apartment.

Old Sunflower looked around him with considerable curiosity.

The floor was of earth, beaten down solid; there were no windows, but two doors, one through which they had entered, and another at the further end of the room.

"Sort of a queer apartment, this, eh?" Murphy remarked, as he helped himself to a chair and began to twist a corkscrew into the cork of the bottle.

"You ar' right thar, for a farm, for sart'in!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, as he took the other chair.

"As I told you, this is a sporting-crib; you could see that for yourself up-stairs, and this cellar was fitted up expressly for sparring exhibitions—glove-fights, you understand?"

"As a rule the police don't interfere, unless the men go in to slug too heavily; but when a fight takes place in a room like this, it is easy enough to keep the police out if two fellows want to go in for a finish fight, and if the cops should get wind of the thing and go in to interfere, while they were breaking in through the doors in the passage—they are pretty stout ones, if you noticed—"

The Westerner said he hadn't looked at the doors.

"—And the locks are extra strong ones. Well, while the police are breaking their way in, the fighters and the audience can make their escape through the rear door."

"Wal, now, I reckon that is an awful smart way to beat the police," Old Sunflower declared, in accents of admiration.

"The man that got it up had a head on his shoulders, you can bet!"

"Oh, yas; sart'in!"

Pop! out flew the cork of the champagne bottle, and Murphy hastened to fill the glasses.

"You will find this extra good fiz!" the sport declared. "Billy has the reputation of keeping as good wine as can be found in all New York."

The Westerner took a generous draught of the sparkling liquid, and then smacked his lips as though he thoroughly enjoyed it.

"By gum! that is mighty good stuff!" he declared. "That is the way it tastes to me, but I don't reckon I am much of a judge of wine. If it was whisky, now, which is my natural food, you could bank on me to tell you just how it ranked, every time."

"Drink hearty!" Murphy exclaimed, refilling the other's glass. "We have got to get rid of this quart between us. I didn't order no small bottle, you know; I don't take no stock in drinking wine by the thimblefuls. I like to take a good pull, and know there is plenty more to come."

"Sart'in—sart'in!" the Westerner coincided. "When you talk that way, you hit me whar I live, every time, for I am one of the kind of men who likes a big drink."

And Old Sunflower, in order to give due emphasis to the words, drained his glass.

The New Yorker was prompt to refill it, but Old Sunflower—who saw everything while not appearing to pay attention to anything—noticed that while his host pressed him to drink, he was not doing much in that line himself.

"Oho! it is his game to get me full," the Westerner thought.

"He is going to get me drunk, and have some fun with me!" and Old Sunflower grinned in the most good-natured way at the New Yorker, who was at that precise moment engaged in filling the glasses.

"I reckon he don't know my capacity for champagne, though," was the Westerner's thought. "The stuff never has any more effect upon me than so much cider. It is pretty certain that I could get away with a couple of bottles, all by myself, without being much the worse for it, and if this fellow thinks he can get me slewed on two-thirds of a bottle, he has made the biggest kind of a mistake."

But when the innocent old fellow from the West saw how anxious his new-found friend was to get him under the influence of the liquor, he thought it was a pity to disappoint his expectations, and so he pretended to become exhilarated.

"I am really getting curious to discover just what kind of a game he wants to play," the old fellow reflected. "And as he is not likely to show his hand until I am considerably mellow, the quicker I appear to get into that delightful state, the quicker I will find out just what he is up to."

So, acting on this idea, Old Sunflower began to act as if the wine had affected his head.

By this time two-thirds of the bottle had been disposed of, and it is safe to say that the Westerner had drank much more than his share.

The New Yorker, who was keeping as close a watch upon his man as ever a spider did upon a fly, judged that a favorable moment was at hand, and so he began to develop his game.

"I tell you what it is, old fellow, I was very much astonished when I saw you in that courtroom!" he declared.

"Is that so?" and Old Sunflower grinned in the face of the other.

"Yes, sir, you were about the last man I expected to see."

"Wal, it was pesky strange."

"And if you hadn't been one of the witnesses, I wouldn't have known you was in the city."

"That is a fact! for this hyer is sich a durned big, overgrown place that a man might live hyer for a year without running across a chap he had ever met before."

"You have got it down to a fine point. By the way, how was it that you happened to be acquainted with this Wolf?" the New Yorker asked, in a very careless way, at the same time again filling the Westerner's glass.

"I'm in luck—I'm in luck!" was the thought which ran rapidly through Old Sunflower's mind.

"He is after information—that is his game. He is sent by the parties who are at the back of this mystery."

"They do not understand why I wanted to see Wolf, and their suspicions have been excited, so they have employed this fellow to get me drunk in order to learn what my business was with the man."

"It is a false move, and I am not the man I think I am, if I can't make it cost them dearly."

"The smartest of rascals will make these mistakes, and if they didn't overreach themselves in this way, how often they would escape the collar."

The grin with which Old Sunflower now favored his host was full of genuine delight;

there not being any pretense about it this time.

"Oh, I didn't know much of anything about him," the Westerner responded. "A friend of mine—a lawyer in Chicago—put me onto him."

"You see, the fact is"—and here the Westerner became extremely confidential—"I have raised a pair of the biggest, all-fired steers that was ever seen; the beasts will weigh a big sight over two thousand apiece, and I have come East for the purpose of finding some man who will go cahoots with me in putting them steers into a show. That's a big lot of money into the scheme now, my friend, I am a-telling you!"

An incredulous smile came over the face of the New Yorker as he filled the last of the champagne into the Westerner's glass.

"You don't mean to say that you hunted up a man like Wolf at eleven o'clock at night just for the sake of ringing him into a little two cent speculation?" he demanded.

"What are you talking about—two-cent speculation?" exclaimed Old Sunflower, pretending to be offended. "It is one of the biggest money-making schemes that was ever heard tell on. That is a pile of money in them steers if the thing is worked right."

"Oh, come now, I think you are giving me a ghost story about them steers!" Murphy exclaimed. "I don't suppose you have got any more sense than the law allows, but I will be hanged if I believe you are fool enough to run after a man like Wolf at eleven o'clock at night just with the idea that you could get him to go into any game of that kind."

"Wal, what is it your business, anyway!" cried Old Sunflower, firmly, with a sudden change in his manner.

"I reckon I ain't obliged to give away everything I know to the first chap I meet just because he claims to be an old friend, and is willing to pay for a bottle of measly champagne!"

"Now, you are getting angry, old man, and you are very foolish to allow your temper to run away with you!"

"Just you sit quiet until I put these things away, and then I will talk to you like a Dutch uncle!"

Old Sunflower stared in a stupid way as Murphy took the bottle and glasses, placed them in the entry, then locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

"Hello! what are you doing that for?" the Westerner demanded.

"Didn't I tell you that I was going to talk to you?" the other exclaimed. "And I locked the door so that you can't get out until I am ready to let you."

"This is a lonely place, you know, for a little quiet business," he continued. "You might yell at the top of your lungs and no one would be able to hear you."

"Well, what of it?"

"I am going to put you through a course of sprouts, that is all!" the New Yorker rejoined.

"You have lied to me about this thing, and now I propose to make you tell the truth. It doesn't matter two pins to me what your business was with Wolf, but since you have lied to me about the matter, I intend to make you tell me the truth."

"You are in a tight place, old man! I am a champion light-weight, and I am going in to hammer you until you think you have run up against a thrashing machine!"

CHAPTER XIV

AN ASTONISHED MAN.

OLD SUNFLOWER stared at the New Yorker as he proceeded to deliberately take off his coat and roll up his sleeves.

"Eh, what did you say?" the Westerner exclaimed. "Say it all over ag'in, please, and say it slow, so's to gi'n me time to kinder swaller it. I am awful dull sometimes, and it takes me a good long while to git things through my wool."

Although the old man spoke in a simple, innocent way, yet the suspicion arose in the mind of the other that he was being "chaffed," and it made him angry.

"Oh, come now! you don't want to try for to play any roots on me, for the thing won't go down!" he exclaimed, fiercely.

"Bless your heart, I wouldn't go for to try anything of the kind!" Old Sunflower responded.

"And if I wanted to try any such game, what chance would an old codger like me, from the wilds of the West, stand with one of you city chaps, a cute son-of-a-gun, as keen as a razor?"

The impression of the New Yorker that the Westerner was making fun of him deepened and his anger increased.

"I don't suppose you comprehend just how tight a place you are in!" he exclaimed. "Or else you wouldn't take the matter so quietly."

"Oh, I don't know 'bout that," Old Sunflower responded.

"I have drunk a good deal of wine, but I reckon I ain't in a condition to go under the table yet."

"You have got me down hyer in a sort of a cellar whar nobody kin hear me, no matter how loud I holler."

"You are anxious to know what my business

was with Mr. Wolf, and as you are a champion light-weight, you propose to hammer me until I git ready to tell you."

"That is it! you have got it down fine! That is the programme, exactly."

"Wal, mebbe you will be able to carry it out, and then ag'in mebbe you will slip up on it, for I tell you that this hyer is a mighty onsart'in world, and heaps of good men git cleaned out every day, and all on account of putting up their money on sure things, which somehow don't pan out as they oughter."

"Say, I think we have had chin-music enough, and I move that we come down to business."

And the speaker threw himself into a boxing position.

"Are you going to spit out what I want, or have I got to polish you off?"

"Hold on a bit! I reckon you don't quite understand this hyer thing yet."

The New Yorker looked surprised.

"What do you mean?"

"Wal, you have explained what you propose to do, but you haven't given me any chance for my white ally yet."

"What are you driving at?"

"I knew you was up to some game as soon as you tackled me, for I ain't near so big a fool as I look," Old Sunflower remarked, with a grin.

"I went along with you all right, for I had a curiosity to see just what kind of a game it was that you was a-putting up. I'm jest as bad as a she-male when it comes to curiosity, you see."

"I s'pose you think you are mighty smart!" the other growled.

"Wal, no, I wasn't reckoned to be extra smart out in Bitter Creek, but all the folks thar allowed that I knew enough to git along with you New Yorkers."

"But to come back to my mutton. It was your game to git me hyer, and it was my game to find out what you was arter."

"You know now, eh?" exclaimed the other, with a sneer.

"Yas, but I don't know all that I want to know."

"Is that so?"

"You bet your life!" Old Sunflower cried, emphatically.

"Say now, who put you on me?—who is back of this thing, anyway?"

"It is none of your business, and I didn't come here to answer questions, but to ask them."

"And you reckon to pound me anyway?"

"Unless you answer, that will be the programme!"

Then, to the surprise of the New Yorker, Old Sunflower rose, stripped off his coat, and began to roll up his sleeves.

"I am going to go you, young man, champion or no champion!" he declared.

"And I am ready to make a bargain with you, too."

"A bargain?" Murphy cried, in utter amazement.

"Yes; if you whip me, I will tell you jest what business I had with Mr. Wolf, and if I make you throw up the sponge, you are to tell me who it is that put you onto me, for of course I understand that you are not doing this for fun; somebody has hired you to undertake this job, and I intend to find out who the party is."

Murphy was surprised by this disclosure, also by the fact that all traces of intoxication had disappeared from the person of the other, and he was angry at the idea of the crafty Westerner fooling him.

"See here, old man, you ain't idiot enough to suppose that you stand any chance against me in a fight?" he exclaimed, scornfully.

"Wal, I dunno 'bout that," Old Sunflower observed, with a grave shake of his big head. "At the first glance it would look as if you had everything your own way, but if you come to figure the thing up, mebbe, you will find out that this hyer thing ain't so durned uneven as it looks."

"You talk like a fool!" Murphy declared.

"You are old enough to be my father, and I can settle you easily with a couple of good punches."

"Oh, no, I am not so old as all that! I am one of the galoots who look a heap sight older than they are, and you are no chicken. Thar isn't ten years' difference in our ages, and I have all the advantage of weight on my side."

"I'm sixty pound to the good, and thar's no fat about me either, all solid bone and muscle, and I reckon that will offset the years."

"I used to be able to handle my fists pretty well, too, and have had the gloves on with some of the best of them, and though I don't doubt that you are a better boxer than I am, still, when it comes to a rush game—and that is jest what I shall play—it will be hit for hit, and my weight is bound to tell."

The New Yorker listened with utter amazement to this speech, which was like a revelation to him.

What manner of man was this who seemed to be fully posted in the technicalities of the boxer's art?

"Who the mischief are you, anyway?" he growled.

"Oh, I'm only a rough-and-ready old cuss from the wilds of the West, and I've got two of the gold-durnest steers— But I reckon you have heard all about them," and the Westerner chuckled in huge delight.

"But to come back to our mutton ag'in."

"Thar's another big advantage which I have got over you, Nailer!"

The other started and a look of amazement appeared on his countenance.

"Oho! that makes you wonder, hey?" and Old Sunflower grinned in the face of the other.

"You didn't reckon that I knew ye, hey?" he exclaimed. "But I do for a fact, Hank Murphy, the Nailer, so-called 'cos thar is a sort of a yarn, that when a boy, across the water, you worked at nail-making for a living, but no one in New York ever knew you to do any work."

"And as for being a champion—you are no champion and never was one, and all because you can't stand the gaff, Murphy."

"A man may be a good boxer, Nailer, you know, able to make a pretty display with the gloves, but when it comes to a downright fight for keeps, and a man has got to stand up to the rack and take his punishment like a man, it is a well-known fact that you were never in it."

"You are too soft, Nailer, you don't like the feel of the steel, and many a time you have been whipped by men who wasn't as good as yourself, jest because they had pluck, and you hadn't."

"Now in this little circus of ours thar is jest whar you will be found wanting."

"Arter I rush you a half a dozen times, and git in some good cracks, you will be wanting to quit."

"When I put the gaff to you, you'll never stand it in the world!"

"You are a liar and I'll hammer the life out of you!" Murphy cried in a rage, and he rushed at the Westerner.

There was a quick exchange of blows.

The boxer "landed" on his antagonist without any trouble, for Old Sunflower was not thinking of guarding but of hitting, and though his antagonist did his best to protect himself, yet the Westerner got in one crack on the jaw which made the boxer's teeth rattle.

And then Old Sunflower went in to "rush" his man just as he had said he would.

Murphy dived and ducked, and managed to punish his antagonist pretty well, but the Westerner was game and would not be denied.

Then there was a clinch, and the moment the big son of the West got his arms around the boxer, Murphy felt that he was in a dangerous position.

He was clever at in-fighting; Old Sunflower though paid no attention to his blows, but maneuvered to get a grip on his throat.

Murphy guessed what he was up to, and fought desperately to prevent it, but Old Sunflower was by far the strongest man, and he held the other with a grip of iron, despite all of Murphy's desperate endeavors to break loose.

At last Old Sunflower got a hold on Murphy's throat.

The Nailer felt that he was done for, for he could not break the Westerner's hold. His breath began to come thick and fast.

A last desperate effort he made to release himself, but his antagonist seemed to have thews and sinews of steel.

"Nailer, you are done for!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, in triumph. "And you might as well throw up the sponge!"

The boxer's answer was a determined effort to break away.

But the attempt cost him dear, for he slipped from very weakness, and down he went upon his back, the Westerner on top, clinging to his throat with all the tenacity of a bulldog.

"This ain't no Marquis of Queensberry's rules, you know," Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"This is a free-for-all, go-as-you-please, catch-as-catch-can, and hold on as long as you have strength to stick to your grip!"

"Oh, I've got you, Nailer, for all you are worth! This fight is mine!"

And so in truth it was.

Murphy was well-nigh choked into insensibility, and gave up his hold on the other from sheer weakness.

Old Sunflower let go and rose to his feet.

CHAPTER XV.

A CLEW.

THE Westerner sat down and regarded his prostrate foe with a grin of satisfaction.

It was several minutes before Murphy recovered sufficiently to sit up, for he had been choked in a merciless manner, and though Old Sunflower had only contrived to get in a couple of good blows, while the boxer had landed twenty, yet those two had made the Nailer sore.

Besides the crack on the jaw, which at the time seemed to loosen all the teeth in his head, he got an awful body blow, the stroke landing with the force and energy of a miniature pile-driver, and the boxer was under the impression that one of his ribs was broken.

A completely demoralized man, then, was he, as he rose to a sitting posture and surveyed the Westerner with wondering astonishment.

"Hyer we are ag'in!" exclaimed Old Sunflower. "Hop up now, lively, and we will have another little hanky-panky time!"

Then the odd genius pretended to spit on his hands, doubled up his fists, and brandished them in the air, as he rose to his feet.

The boxer got up slowly, laying hold of one of the chairs as he did so to steady himself, and then he sunk into it, regarding the Westerner with an expression of profound, half-dazed astonishment.

"Come, come! this will not do!" Old Sunflower ejaculated.

"You don't want to sit down, you know. I am all ready for a leetle more fun."

"I am disposed to be liberal with you, you understand, but this is business, and you can't expect to take your own time between the rounds."

"It is a good three minutes already, and that ought to be enough for any man, no matter under whose rules he is fighting."

"I think I have got all I want," the boxer responded, sullenly.

"You don't tell me!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, an incredulous look on his features.

"That is what I said," Murphy answered, doggedly.

"Oh, but I say, this will not do at all; we have not had half a fight yet!"

"I'm no hog, and I have got enough!"

"I was a true prophet, then, hey, Nailer?" Old Sunflower exclaimed, with a chuckle, as he resumed his seat. "I told you that you didn't stand any chance, and you see I was right; but, really, I didn't expect to make you throw up the sponge so soon."

"You hav'n't got as much backbone as I gave you credit for possessing."

The boxer stared at the triumphant speaker in sullen anger, deeply tinged with amazement.

"Who in blazes are you, anyway?" he exclaimed.

"Who am I? Why, I am just a plain, old-fashioned rustler from Bitter Creek, but we raise some awful tough men out West, the cyclone breed, you might call us, and when we get a-going we generally make things hum."

"How comes it that you know all about me?" Murphy asked, evidently deeply amazed.

"Wal, thar isn't anything wonderful 'bout that!" the other responded. "Didn't you travel all over the country with a circus, you and a pard, a-giving exhibitions of the manly art of self-defense?"

"Yes, I did, but I don't know how it comes that you are so well posted about me?" the boxer remarked, much puzzled.

"Oh, you are too modest now!" Old Sunflower declared in a bantering way. "You are a great man in your line, and it is not wonderful that people should know all about you—men that you never even heard of."

"You understand by this time, I reckon, that I was able to size you up in a first-class manner. I am generally pretty good at that sort of thing, and I ain't often far out of the way when I go in to take a man's measure."

"I will say though that I am surprised at your being ready to quit so soon," he continued.

"It was my calculation that you would last for three or four rounds, anyway, and I confidently expected that I was in for a good pounding before I could git you to throw up the sponge."

"I'm no fool!" the boxer cried in sullen anger. "You are too much for me, and I have sense enough to know it."

"That is jest what I tried to tell you before we begun this thing, but you wouldn't have it," Old Sunflower responded.

"My natural advantages are too great, and though you are a more scientific man than I am, yet strength will be served, and the moment I got you in my clutches you was done for. And, Nailer, this hyer little picnic has shown me one thing that I did not suspect, and that is that though you are an elegant boxer, yet you are no punisher. You kin hit your man all right, but you can't hit him hard enough to suggest to him that it would be a heap of money in his pocket if he quit early."

"I knew you couldn't stand the gaff, and would be sure to weaken if the steel was put right into you, but I expected you would make a far better fight than you did."

"Oh, it is all very well for you to talk, but you are a blamed sight better man than you try to make out," Murphy growled.

"I have stood up against some good men in my time, but I never run against one who could hit any harder than you can."

"Blame me! if I don't believe you have broken one of my ribs, and that smash in the jaw that you gave me seemed to knock me silly for a moment."

"Wal, I reckon I am a pretty tough old rooster," the Westerner admitted.

"You see I swung a hammer in a blacksmith shop for nigh onto ten years, and that sort of work is mighty apt to fix a man so he kin hit a tolerable hard blow."

"Then in this little thing I didn't go in for any fancy business, but to git in my work so as to make it tell, and I reckon I did too!" And Old Sunflower grinned, exultingly, as he made the declaration.

"The fight is yours, and I'm a whipped man," the boxer remarked in a dogged way.

"Sart'in! that is about the way I figure it out!" the Westerner observed with a deal of satisfaction.

"And since I have won I am entitled to the stake."

"The stake?" the other asked.

"Sart'in! didn't I tell ye before we began that I wanted to know who put you onto me?"

"Oh, yes, I understand."

"Wal, I meant what I said—every word of it!"

"Say, old man, you ought not to make me give the thing away!"

"Ah! what are you talking about?" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "If there was money up on the fight, you wouldn't dream of trying to keep me from claiming the stakes arter you had gi'n it."

"Yes, that is true."

"Then spit out what I want to know! You needn't be afeard that I will give the thing away. Nobody will ever know it; you can tell any ghost-story you like about the thing and I will stand to it."

"It rather goes against my grain though to peach," the boxer observed.

"Of course, that is natural, but when a man gits into a tight place he often has to do things which ain't pleasant."

"The circumstance needn't get out, you know," Old Sunflower continued. "I am no talker, and you can depend upon me to keep my mouth shet."

"The party that put up the job needn't know anything about it, for you can depend upon my not giving the snap away."

"All right! I will make a clean breast of it then."

"That is jest the gait you ought to strike, and the sooner you get at it the better!"

"You are right in thinking I was hired to find out all I could about you."

"Sart'in! I was sure of that," Old Sunflower declared. "Ob, I'm no fool if I am a green countryman from the wild and woolly West!"

"The man who put up the job is no stranger to you."

"I 'spicioned that."

"It was Doctor Grolance!"

"Oho! the fellow that came to Wolf's door on the night of the death, and found me pounding away at it."

"Yes, that is the man."

"Wal, I am r'ally astonished!" the Westerner declared.

"What on airth is it to him?"

The Nailer shook his head.

"You are too much for me!" he responded.

"I don't know anything about that—hav'n't an idea. All I know is that the Doc sent word he wanted to see me, and directed me to come to the trial. Then when I met him there he pointed you out to me and said he would give a ten-dollar note if I would find out why you wanted to see Wolf."

"Ten dollars, hey?" Old Sunflower remarked. "Wal, he didn't set much of a price on the service."

"Do you think so?" the other asked, surprised by the declaration. "Well, now, I thought it was a big price for so little a job."

"Oh, yes, that is your stingy New York way of looking at it. Out in the great and glorious West, in the country of the bounding per-a-ries, we do things on a larger scale!" Old Sunflower declared.

"If I had talked to you about any such job, I would have been pretty sure to have hit you a twenty-five dollar lick right at the beginning!"

"We Western rustlers go on the idee, you see, that if you want a man to do good work, you must offer good pay."

"Well, I suppose you are right, as far as that goes; but ten was all he was willing to give, and, in fact, I didn't grumble at the sum, for I thought I was getting a good stake for small work."

"But you didn't know then what kind of a man you were going to buck up against, hey, pard?"

And then the Westerner threw back his head and indulged in a hearty laugh.

"I reckon now that you have been properly introduced to me—that ten dollars would only seem to be a sort of a flea-bite, hey?"

"You can bet your life on that!" the boxer exclaimed, emphatically. "I wouldn't tackle you again for the best hundred dollars that was ever hung up in a ring."

"Nailer, you ar' soft," the Westerner declared, with a grave shake of the head.

"That is what is the matter with you; you ar' an elegant boxer, but you can't punish, and you can't stand the gaff, and such a man as you hasn't any business in the ring."

"The only man who can succeed in that sort of life is a fellow of the bull-dog breed, a man who never knows that he is getting the worst of it as long as he has strength to stand on his feet."

"But, to come back to the doctor. What is the cuss arter, hey?"

"Blamed if I know."

"Why should he be anxious in regard to my business with Wolf. According to his evidence he was a stranger to the man."

"I don't know anything about it. All I know is what I tell you," the boxer replied. "And I am giving it to you straight, too."

"Oh, I have faith in you, old man, as far as that goes," the Westerner declared.

"And I say, Nailer, have you any idea why I have faith in you?" he asked, fixing his shrewd, gray eyes on the face of the other.

"No, I haven't," responded the boxer, rather surprised.

"Because I think you see that you will do better to give me a square deal than to try to work any brace game on me."

"I tell you what it is, Nailer: you will find that I am one of the best and squarest men you ever had anything to do with. And when it comes to the paymaster act, you will find I am away up at the top of the heap!"

"Ten dollars you were going to get, hey?"

"Yes; and I thought it was a soft snap, too."

And the man made a wry face.

"Oh, wal, we ar' apt to meet with these little slip-ups once in awhile."

Then Old Sunflower drew out his wallet, fished out a twenty-dollar bill from the roll, crumpled it up and threw it at the boxer.

"Thar's a double saw-buck for you; and that is the kind of mountain-sheep I am."

The Nailer looked at the bill and then at the Westerner, amazement written on his face.

"That will kinder compensate for your disappointment," Old Sunflower remarked, with a chuckle.

"Well, blame me, if you ain't the queerest rooster I ever struck!" the boxer exclaimed, as he pocketed the bill.

"I am a good man to tie to if you strike me right," the Westerner declared.

CHAPTER XVI.

GETTING INFORMATION.

"WELL, after this little transaction, there isn't much doubt about that matter in my mind," the boxer remarked.

"Now then, Nailer, old man, I want a little information out of you," the Westerner declared.

"You are welcome to all I can give you."

"Who is this Doctor Grolance—is he crooked?"

"Humph! that isn't an easy question to answer."

"How comes it that he spotted you for this business?"

"Oh, I have known him for a couple of years now; he isn't much of a doctor—that is, doesn't make much money, and it is a well-understood thing among men who are on the 'cross' that, if a fellow goes to the doctor with a bullet in him, or a knife-stab, or a broken head, the Doc will do his best to patch the wound up without asking any impudent questions as to how the hurt was received."

"Ah, yes, I see, and it follows, of course, that the doctor has a big acquaintance among the crooks?"

"Yes, I reckon he knows about as many as any man in the town."

"But you have never known him to do any crooked work on his own account?"

"No, but from what I know of the man, although it is mighty little, I would set him down for a bloke who wouldn't mind what he put his hand to, so long as there was a good stake to be made, and the chance was good to pull the trick off without getting the collar."

"He struck me as being a pretty deep fellow."

"Yes, he never has much to say, mighty quiet, as if he was kinder afraid he might give himself away."

"He is a German, and if he got mixed up in any crooked business, his pals would be apt to be Germans like himself."

"Likely."

"Now then, you want to give the Doc a good steer, you know, so as to grab your ten," the Westerner observed, with a sly chuckle.

"Since he is so mighty anxious for to find out what I wanted of Wolf, it seems to me a pity not to gratify his curiosity."

"The reason I was so anxious to see Wolf was because, being a leetle short of money, I expected to raise a loan out of him, for he had struck me once in Chicago, and I had let him have fifty on his note."

"That's a pretty good yarn," the other remarked, with an approving nod.

"It will go through all right, I reckon, and will give you a chance to make your leetle stake."

"And now a parting word with you, Nailer!" the Westerner exclaimed, in a most impressive way.

"You want to keep your mouth shut 'bout this little bit of business!" he continued.

"I reckon that it is just as well that the doctor shouldn't know that I have tumbled to his little game, so don't give the snap away. And if you should happen to run across anything that will give you a hint as to why the doctor is curious about me in this Wolf business, it will be solid dollars in your pocket if you will hunt

me up as soon as you can and give me the p'int. I have a room at the Astor House."

The boxer declared he would be glad to do it, and then the two parted.

The Nailer remained in the saloon, anxious for some liquid refreshment after his exertions, and Old Sunflower started for down-town.

"I have a clew at last," he murmured. "The Main Guy made a mistake, as the most of these deep plotters are sure to do, sooner or later, and as I have got hold of the tail of the rat it will be mighty funny if I can't manage to pull the varmint out of his hole before I get through with the affair."

Then he meditated over the situation for a moment.

"Let me see!" he murmured, "how had I better go ahead?"

"Wouldn't it be a good idee to talk the thing over with that young lawyer? He struck me as being an unusually smart fellow; in fact, I hav'n't met a man in a dog's age who has made as good an impression on me."

The more he thought about the matter, the greater the advantage of this action appeared to him, so he went directly to Kingswell's office.

The young lawyer occupied cozy rooms in one of the big down-town buildings in the neighborhood of the Post Office.

The young man was in when Old Sunflower arrived, and he greeted the Westerner like an old friend.

"I am a little ahead of time," Old Sunflower remarked, as he helped himself to a chair.

"But as I got a p'int on this case I thought I would come and consult you in regard to the matter."

"All right! I am glad you did."

"I don't know as you can spare the time."

Kingswell laughed.

"Don't you worry about that. I am not much troubled by clients," he explained. "You see I have only just begun to practice. My family is very wealthy, with large real estate interests in New York, and I studied law more for the purpose of looking after my own affairs than with the expectation of ever becoming a great legal light."

"You are fortunately situated, but men in your position rarely distinguish themselves in any line, for lacking the spur of necessity they do not exert themselves to win the position which they might attain if circumstances forced them to make a hard fight."

"There is certainly a good deal of truth in that."

"Now, if you will give me your attention for a few minutes, I will tell you how I have progressed."

"I know that this hyer thing ain't any of my business!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, abruptly. "But as I have got interested in it I will be blamed if I don't see it through!"

"My own situation, exactly!"

Then the Westerner related the particulars of his interview with the widow of the railway king.

"Ah, yes, I am well acquainted with Mrs. Macfarland," Kingswell remarked when Old Sunflower ended his recital.

"I don't suppose that in all America can be found a more proud and haughty woman," he continued. "She is a member of one of the old families; all her race have always had a deal of money, and prided themselves upon holding their heads as high as the highest."

"If there was a shameful secret connected with such a dame as this American queen, it would be an awful blow for her to have it made public," the Westerner suggested.

The young lawyer shook his head.

"I do not place any reliance in that idea," he declared. "I knew Wolf well; he was a terribly dissipated fellow, and it was the general opinion of the men who knew all about him that his head has not been quite right for the last year or so."

"I understand; in such a state it would be quite possible for him to imagine all sorts of strange things."

"Exactly! and to be positive that they were real."

"My first idea was that, if there was a secret, Mrs. Macfarland had more reason to wish Wolf out of the way than anybody else."

"I do not take any stock in the idea at all."

"In a case of this kind a man must follow up every idea which seems to have any bearing on the affair, whether it looks probable or not, until he is satisfied there isn't anything in it."

"That is undoubtedly correct."

"Baffled in that quarter, I got, by accident, on an entirely different tack."

And then the old Westerner told the story of his encounter with Nailer.

"Well, I don't understand this at all!" the young lawyer cried.

"Why should this strange doctor trouble his head about the matter? What was it to him why you sought Wolf?"

"Aha! that is a difficult question to answer, and a man must put on his thinking-cap."

"In the first place, it is plain that the doctor did take a great interest in the matter, or else he would not have hired the boxer to find out what I wanted of Wolf."

"Another p'int! Was the man a stranger to Wolf?"

And a shrewd look appeared on Old Sunflower's weather-beaten face as he put the question.

"According to the evidence which he gave at the inquest, he was," the young lawyer observed, thoughtfully.

"You remember he testified he found the call on his slate."

"Yes; and he hadn't any idea who put it thar, and, what is more, no clew was gained to the messenger."

"That is true; and when you come to look in to that matter, it seems very strange, indeed!" Kingswell declared.

"Sart'in! Thar ain't no mistake 'bout that. If the message was an honest one and the thing was all straight, how comes it that the messenger didn't come forward for to give his evidence?"

"There was no light thrown upon that point," the young lawyer observed.

"And that shows thar was something wrong 'bout it," Old Sunflower argued. "If the message was sent, somebody must have carried it."

"Who was it, and why didn't the party come forward? There isn't any reason why the messenger should hesitate to give his testimony and tell who sent him."

"Yes; and there is another important point!" Kingswell exclaimed. "Who could have sent the message?"

"That is a question that I have been puzzling over ever since I got interested in the thing," the Westerner declared.

"As far as I can figger the thing out, thar was only two persons who could have sent it—Wolf, himself, or the woman who was found in the room."

"True; but it seems to be quite out of the question for either one of them to have sent the message," the young lawyer argued.

"Such a dose as Wolf took would have produced almost immediate insensibility, so that, even if he had taken the drug with suicidal intention, then repented the act, and desired a doctor, he would not have been able to summon assistance; and the girl was fully as badly off."

"And then in such a case, too, when the doctor was needed so badly, the messenger would never have been satisfied to leave a call on a slate, but would have kept on until he found a doctor at home," Kingswell continued.

"Unless the messenger was a natural-born fool, he most certainly would have adopted that course."

"Sart'in, that is how I figger it, and so I have come to the conclusion that no message was sent," Old Sunflower declared.

"This hyer doctor got up the yarn 'bout the message on the slate so as to account for his going to see Wolf. It was on the cards for him to discover the dead man, and it was necessary to arrange the thing so that the discovery would appear to be purely accidental."

"From what you say, I judge you have an impression that this Doctor Grolance had something to do with the death of Wolf?"

"That is my opinion, but the thing was planned so well that, although I flatter myself I can see as far into a millstone as the next man, I had no suspicion the doctor wasn't all right and aboveboard until he made the mistake of setting the boxer at me," Old Sunflower observed.

"I knew there was something wrong 'bout the message, and I jumped to the conclusion right away that the thing had been fixed so as to have the doctor discover the body, but I didn't reckon he had any hand in the thing. I took him to be an instrument—a blind one, you understand, but now I have got the idee that he is one of the principals."

"But the motive for the crime?" the lawyer questioned. "That is one of the first things to be considered in a case of this kind, you know. A deed like this would not be committed without a reason."

"You ar' too much for me!" the Westerner replied.

"At present thar don't seem to be any reason for the thing," he continued. "But now that I have got on the trail of this doctor, I reckon I may be able to get hold of something which may throw a leetle light on this subject."

Kingswell glanced at the clock.

"It is time we were off," he said.

"Go ahead!" Old Sunflower responded, rising.

Thanks to the influence which the young lawyer possessed, the path to the prisoner's cell was open to them, but when they arrived at the Tombs they were obliged to wait in the outer office, as the warden was engaged.

A middle-aged, pompous, fat gentleman here bustled up to the lawyer.

"My dear fellow, have you any influence in this place?" he inquired.

"Not much—why?" Kingswell replied.

"I want to see this Mrs. Wolf!"

"What have you got to do with her?"

"You know I am general agent for the Great American Life Insurance Company?"

"Yes."

"Well, my company propose to stand by the young woman. We don't believe that Wolf was murdered. He was insured in our company for twenty thousand dollars, and if we can prove he took his own life, we will not have to pay the money!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MOTIVE.

"TWENTY thousand dollars!" exclaimed Old Sunflower, affecting to be profoundly amazed. "Gosh! that is an awful lot of money!"

"That is the sum to a cent!" the fussy fat man declared. "And I can assure you that my people feel very sore over the matter. The policy was only taken out a week ago, and if we are compelled to pay the money it will be a sad loss, and the worst thing about the matter is that I was the man who arranged the business."

"I thought, of course, that I was extra smart in putting the affair through, for although I knew Wolf to be a rather fast man, yet our doctor reported him to be a first-class risk, and I can tell you, my dear Mr. Kingswell, I just jumped at the chance of getting him into our company."

"You have a suicide clause in your policies?" the lawyer asked.

"Oh, yes. If we can prove that Wolf committed suicide, we will not have to pay a solitary cent."

"I s'pose the policy was written in Mrs. Wolf's favor?" the Westerner observed, carelessly.

"Oh no!" the insurance agent replied, immediately. "It was made out a week ago, and at that time there wasn't any Mrs. Wolf, you know."

"Yas, yas, I forgot all about that, but it is jest like me, for I hain't got no head!" the Westerner declared, in his easy, good-natured way.

"It was made out to his sister, of course, Mrs. Macfarland," Kingswell remarked.

"Not at all!" the insurance man declared. "It was one of those little business arrangements which are so common nowadays. Wolf owed a certain party money, and he wanted more; the party wasn't willing to advance without being secured in some way in case anything should happen to Wolf. The man, apparently, felt perfectly sure he would get his money if Wolf lived, but was doubtful about doing so in case of his death, so in order to make himself secure, he got Wolf to insure his life in his favor."

"Say! I wouldn't mind striking a man of that kind myself!" Old Sunflower declared, with a knowing grin.

"Whar kin I find the cuss? It would be handy to know in case I ever wanted to make a raise."

"His name is Mangood, and he keeps a stable on upper Sixth avenue," the insurance agent replied.

"I know the man, I think," the lawyer observed. "Abraham Mangood?"

"Yes, that is his name," the fat man answered.

"Abraham, hey?" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "That sounds as if he was one of the children of Israel, Mister— How may I call your name, by the way?"

"Normand—Colonel Normand, at your service, sir," the fat man responded, with a polite bow.

"Glad to meet you—shake!" exclaimed the Westerner, extending his big brown hand. "My name is Flowers—Jonathan Flowers, and I am all the way from Bitter Creek, in the land of the setting sun!"

The colonel shook hands with Old Sunflower, and declared he was delighted to meet with a gentleman from the West, in which section he had many near and dear friends.

"But 'bout this hyer Mangood," Old Sunflower observed. "I feel a heap of interest in him now, I tell you! Any feller who has saved enough to lend a lot of money to another chap on no better security than a life insurance policy is a good man to know, haw, haw, haw!"

And the old fellow indulged in a hearty laugh at his joke, thus plainly showing that he considered it to be an excellent one.

"He is a very nice man," the colonel observed. "He is carrying a policy in our company. But in spite of the fact that he is named Abraham, I do not think he is a Jew, though; by birth he is an Englisaman—a Londoner, if I remember rightly."

"Yas, yas, and do you know I have heard that they do a heap of queer things over thar in the money-lending line," Old Sunflower remarked, with a wise shake of the head. "Lending the solid cash on life insurance policies, and to young men on the strength that some day they will inherit money, and things of that kind that we ain't up to hyer."

"Yes, I believe there are a class of men in London who do business in that way, and I presume, as Mangood is an Englishman, he got his idea about Wolf's getting out a life in-

surance policy from the way such business is done in London."

"No doubt," Kingswell assented. "But in regard to this case of Mrs. Wolf, I am of the same opinion as yourself, that she is not guilty."

"Certainly not!" the colonel exclaimed, in the most emphatic manner. "In my mind there is not a doubt as to her innocence."

"My dear sir, it was a clear case of suicide if ever there was one in this world!"

"I was present at the inquest, and from the evidence presented became satisfied the girl was not guilty."

"Why, it was as plain as the nose on a man's face!" the insurance agent declared.

"Of course the jury were a pack of idiots, or else they never would have returned such a supremely ridiculous verdict."

"But it is a well-known fact that these coroner's juries are never renowned for their intelligence," the colonel added.

"The injustice of the verdict made so deep an impression upon me that I came to the conclusion to take a hand in the matter myself," Kingswell explained.

"Is it possible?" the colonel asked.

"Oh, yes, and that is why I am here to-day," the young lawyer replied.

"The girl is apparently alone and friendless, and in her present position needs aid, so I have determined to offer my services to her."

"It is a noble act, my dear Kingswell!" the colonel declared, in his pompous, theatrical way. "You really must allow me the honor of shaking hands with you!"

And then, with much dignity, the colonel wrung the hand of the young lawyer.

"Well, I am not the kind of man who delights in pushing himself forward, but in this case I felt as if I ought to interfere."

"Yes, yes, of course; a noble act, my dear sir. You are of the stuff of which heroes are made!" the insurance agent declared.

"Oh, no, I would not make much of a show in the hero line," Kingswell replied with a laugh.

"My dear boy, you are not doing yourself justice!" the colonel declared.

"So you are going to volunteer to defend her?"

"Such is my intention."

"And I came for the purpose of telling her that my company would provide counsel."

"I have an idea!" the colonel exclaimed, abruptly, and he laid his fat forefinger in an impressive way on the young lawyer's arm.

"Why can't you represent us in this matter? The case seems to me to be a very simple one; the girl is clearly innocent, and when a proper investigation is made of the matter it will be apparent to the dullest mind, so there is no need of a great array of lawyers to get her off."

"I would be glad to act for your company as far as proving the innocence of the girl goes, although I am not so certain in my own mind that Wolf committed suicide as you appear to be."

"Well, well, bless me! is that possible?" the colonel exclaimed, apparently much amazed.

"Yes, I think from the appearance of things that he was murdered, although I am satisfied that the girl did not have anything to do with the matter," Kingswell replied.

"Then your argument will not be that the girl could not have murdered him because he killed himself?" the insurance man asked, thoughtfully.

"No, for I do not think so."

"You believe he was murdered, but think the girl is innocent."

"Yes, so you see that it would not be hardly fair for me to represent your company in this case, for if I understand your position, you are taking an interest in this matter simply to save your people from paying the insurance money, which they must do if it is proved that Wolf was murdered, and not because you care anything about the girl."

The effect of this plain, straight-forward statement of the case was to cause the colonel to become considerably embarrassed.

He hemmed and hawed for a moment and then said:

"Well, your statement is correct, of course—that is on the face of it; if Wolf had not been insured in our company we would not have thought of interfering in the affair. It would be folly for me to deny that; still, my dear Kingswell, you must understand that all the managing men of my company firmly believe that Wolf committed suicide, and they are naturally anxious to prove that he was not murdered, and if they did not think so they would not interfere in the matter."

"The company which I have the honor to represent is one of the strongest and most reliable in the country, its president and directors are all first-class men, and no amount of money would tempt them to commit a dishonorable act," the colonel continued in a grandiloquent way.

"And I hope you understand, my dear Mr. Kingswell, that if they were not perfectly satisfied that Wolf took his own life they would never have even dreamed of interfering."

"Oh, yes, I comprehend the situation; your

people are all good men, of course, men who stand high in public opinion, but even good men are inclined to be prejudiced when so large a sum as twenty thousand dollars comes into a question," the young lawyer remarked, shrewdly.

"Well, I presume that in some cases it might have weight, but, really, I don't think that in this matter it has had any influence."

"Say! this hyer ain't one of those cases which come up every once in a while where a man is murdered for the sake of somebody gitting the insurance money?" Old Sunflower exclaimed, abruptly.

A look of horror appeared on the fat face of the insurance agent.

"Oh, no, nothing of the kind, I am certain!" he declared.

"I have heard that in England a trick of that kind has been worked," the Westerner said.

"No doubt that such a thing has happened," the agent admitted. "But in this case all the probabilities are against it."

"This Mangood ain't the kind of feller to put up such a game?" Old Sunflower inquired.

"No, no, decidedly not!" the colonel replied.

"He is a respectable business man, whose character is beyond reproach."

"I was well acquainted once with a retired detective who settled in my neighborhood, and he put me up to all sorts of queer games," the Westerner remarked in a reflective way.

"And I remember his telling me how he used to work in a case of this kind."

"The first p'int, he said, was to find the party who would profit most by the death of the victim, and in nine cases out of ten you would strike the feller who put up the job."

"That is a very old idea," the colonel observed, a little impatiently. "Nothing novel about that."

"I reckon thar is a heap of truth in it though!" Old Sunflower replied with a grin.

"Now in this hyer case it seems to me that Mangood stands a chance to win some big money, for the odds are great that he didn't lend Wolf any twenty thousand dollars."

"Oh, I don't think there is anything in that idea at all!" the insurance man replied.

"Ah, colonel, all you can see in this case is suicide, eh?" the young lawyer observed in a bantering way.

"Really now I cannot look at the matter in any other light," the other replied, a little testily.

"Well, I am sorry that I cannot act for you in this matter," Kingswell remarked. "But, as the circumstances are, it is not possible."

"Yes; but hang the thing! that isn't the worst of it!" the colonel exclaimed. "If you are going in to prove that the man was murdered, you are acting directly against us!"

"It is not so bad as that," Kingswell answered. "My argument will be that the girl did not murder the man."

"Yes, but it is decidedly to your interest to prove that somebody else did," the colonel retorted, in an aggrieved way.

"I grant you that; but I don't think I will make much in that line, as I am not a detective."

"Are you here now to see the girl?"

"Yes."

"Well, you will not be able to see her unless you have a 'pull,' for I was told the thing could not be done. I resolved to wait and see the warden in person, though, hoping I might be able to convince him I ought to be admitted. It is an outrage to keep friends from a young woman in such an extremity!" the colonel declared.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COLONEL IS DENIED.

THE appearance of the warden at this moment ended the conversation.

The colonel immediately hurried to the official, introduced himself, and explained his business.

"Sorry to be obliged to refuse you, but it is against orders to allow any one to visit the young woman at present," the warden replied, with firm politeness.

"My dear sir, you must really excuse me for presuming to debate this matter with you," the insurance agent said, in his plausible, "soapy," way. "But do you understand the gravity of the case? The company I have the honor to represent believe the girl to be innocent, and have deputed me to see her and tender the assurance that proper legal counsel will be engaged to defend her."

"I can send a message to that effect, but cannot permit you to have an interview with her."

"Really, sir, you ought not, in the name of common humanity, to deny me admittance!" the colonel declared. "Think how it will cheer the poor girl's heart when she comprehends that one of the biggest corporations in the country is prepared to undertake her defense!" the colonel declared, theatrically.

"You will have to allow the message to do the cheering," the warden remarked, with grim determination.

"But is it not usual to permit the man who is prepared to defend the prisoner to have an opportunity to converse with his client?" the insurance man asked, insinuatingly.

"Oh, yes; and if you were a lawyer and I was satisfied you were the one whom the prisoner desired for counsel, I might strain a point and admit you."

"But it is just the same," the other argued.

"It may appear so to you, but it decidedly does not to me," the warden replied.

"You are not a lawyer, and if you were, I am not certain that the girl wishes to avail herself of your services; in fact, I feel pretty certain that she does not. And she is not as friendless as you think, either, for, if I mistake not, this gentleman,"—and he nodded to Kingswell—"is a lawyer who intends to appear for her."

"Yes, that is correct," the young man remarked. "My name is Kingswell, and I intend to defend the girl, as I believe her to be innocent."

"You will admit this gentleman, then, although you refuse me?" the colonel exclaimed, with an injured air.

"Yes, as her lawyer he has a claim to an interview which I do not care to dispute," the warden affirmed.

"Of course, it would be unbecoming for a man like myself to attempt to instruct a gentleman of your experience in regard to his duties," the colonel remarked, in an extremely dignified way.

Then he turned to the young lawyer.

"You have managed to secure a decided advantage, my dear Kingswell, but I bear you no malice," he continued.

"You might do me the favor, by the way, to say to the young lady that my company, being satisfied that Mr. Wolf committed suicide, are prepared to undertake her defense if she wishes them to do so."

"I have no objection to carry the message, and I can assure you, colonel, that if the young lady wishes to accept the offer, I shall not attempt to persuade her to the contrary," the young lawyer replied.

"I expected no less from a man like yourself, and so I am not at all amazed by your decision," the insurance agent remarked, with a dignified bow.

"But I must say, without meaning any disparagement to you, that I hope the young lady will confide her defense to us."

"It seems to me that the case is rather out of your line," the colonel continued.

"Now it would be our game to employ one of the best criminal lawyers in New York—a man of great experience in matters of this kind, and whose very appearance would have great weight."

"Yes, I am aware that I have never undertaken a case of this kind, but there must be a commencement, you know," Kingswell replied, good-naturedly.

"Oh, yes! Well, I wish you luck!" the other declared.

"There is not a doubt in my mind in regard to the young woman's innocence, and I have no doubt you will be able to prove it," the insurance man continued. "But if you should happen to strike any snags, and need assistance, we shall be glad to furnish it, provided the case is conducted on the lines I laid down."

The young lawyer bowed and the colonel departed.

"He is a good deal of a humbug," the warden commented. "I don't take much stock in these soft-spoken, oily men, and you can bet all you are worth that if his company hadn't a big stake in this matter, neither he nor they would have troubled their heads about it."

"There is no doubt about that. The colonel is a great talker, but you can't always go by what he says," Kingswell asserted.

"By the way, is there any objection to this gentleman going with me?" and the young lawyer nodded to the Westerner.

"Not at all."

"He takes a great interest in the affair. This is Mr. Flowers, who was one of the men who discovered the body."

The warden shook hands with the Westerner, and a puzzled look came over his face.

"It seems to me that I have seen you somewhere before, Mr. Flowers," the official said. "There is something about your face which seems to be familiar, yet I can't place you just at this moment."

"Ever been in Chicago?" Old Sunflower asked.

"Oh yes, a dozen times!"

"I reckon you must have run across me thar, then, for I have put in a heap of time in the Windy City."

"Yes, possibly so," the warden said, but with a doubtful look on his face.

"It is mighty strange, though, that I can't recall the circumstances, for it is very seldom that I am bothered about such a matter."

"These little things will strike a man sometimes," Old Sunflower remarked, with his everlasting grin.

Then the warden called an attendant and gave orders to conduct the visitors to the girl's cell.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STRANGE STORY.

THE girl rose to receive the visitors when the keeper unlocked the door and admitted them into the cell.

She had been sitting on a low stool by the side of the narrow prison bed.

A look of recognition appeared on her face as she caught sight of Old Sunflower, who grinned at her in the most friendly and reassuring manner.

"We have come to see how you are getting along, little gal!" the Westerner exclaimed. "This hyer gentleman is a lawyer, and he reckons he will be able to git you out of this hyer pesky scrape."

Surprise was visible on the girl's features.

"Is it possible?" she exclaimed.

"Sart'in! True as Gospel, you had better believe!" the Westerner declared.

"Now jest sit down on the stool and make yourself comfortable, while we camp hyer on the bed," he continued. "We have come to have a good long talk with you for to see if we can't git at the rights of this hyer durned business. You are in a pesky heap of trouble, but don't be afeard but what you will pull through all right."

"You can rest assured, miss, that we will do our best to help you," the young lawyer declared. "And as we are perfectly satisfied that the accusation which has been brought against you is entirely unfounded, we do not doubt we shall be able to prove it to be so to the satisfaction of every one."

"I am very much obliged to you for your kindness," the girl said, gratefully. "The more so because I am taken completely by surprise, for I did not think there was any one in this great city who would try to do anything for me."

"That is jest whar you made a big mistake!" the Westerner declared, as he took a seat on the bed.

"Big cities ar' kinder overgrown monsters, so to speak, and though thar ar' jest as good people hived in amid the brick walls as kin be scared up anywhar, yet 'tain't allers easy to git at 'em. Thar is a good Lord, though, who sees that the innocent ain't punished with the guilty."

"Jest you tell your story to this gentleman—don't keep nothing back, and the odds are big that he will git you through all right."

"Yes, give me your full confidence and do not be afraid to trust me," the young lawyer remarked, as he took a seat by Old Sunflower.

"I would be very ungrateful indeed if I did not trust you after you had taken the trouble to come forward in my behalf," the girl observed as she also seated herself.

"We were present at the inquest, so heard your story, and though the jury showed by their verdict that they did not place any reliance upon it, yet both this gentleman and I believe you spoke the truth," Kingswell declared.

"We ar' dead sure on it!" the Westerner exclaimed with great emphasis. "I was present when you came out of the inner room, and I know from the way you looked that you had been drugged."

"Oh, yes, it is the truth!" Milicent affirmed, earnestly.

"By the way, I suppose we ought to introduce ourselves," the young lawyer observed, abruptly. "This gentleman is from the West and his name is Flowers, while I am a New Yorker and called Kingswell."

"Kingswell!" exclaimed the girl, with a look of surprise.

"Yes, that is my name."

"Cadwallader Kingswell?"

Now it was the young lawyer's turn to appear amazed.

"No, not Cadwallader; Egbert is my name, but my father was called Cadwallader."

"And does he live in Gramercy Park?" the girl inquired, eagerly.

"He did live there, as I do now, but my father has been dead for over ten years."

"Is it possible?" and the look upon Milicent's face plainly showed that the news was unwelcome.

"Yes, but did you know my father?"

"No, but I came to New York to see him."

"This is something of a riddle."

"I can easily explain it if you will listen to my story."

"Sart'in!" Old Sunflower exclaimed. "That is jest what we are hyer for, and you kin bet high on it!"

"I did not tell the story of my life when I was examined to-day," the girl began. "I did not think it was necessary as it had nothing whatever to do with this mystery."

"Under the circumstances I think you acted wisely," Kingswell remarked.

"I have not much to tell, for my life has been an uneventful one. My parents I never knew."

"I want to know!" Old Sunflower exclaimed in amazement. "Darn me if this hyer don't beat all!"

"It is the truth. I was brought up by an old English couple who lived in San Francisco until about two months ago when we moved to Tacoma."

"I always believed I was an orphan, for I was told that my father died before I was born and my mother shortly after my birth."

"The Englishwoman, Mrs. Thorwood, said she was a cousin of my mother's, and that was the reason why she took care of me. Mr. Thorwood was a builder and possessed of considerable means. Both were very kind to me and could not have treated me any better if I had been their own child."

"So my life passed on in calm and peaceful ways, until about a fortnight ago when Mrs. Thorwood, after receiving a letter from San Francisco, came to me much agitated."

"I have a confession to make to you, my child," she said. "And I hope you will not blame me for keeping the truth from you," she continued. "Your mother is not dead, but confined in a private lunatic asylum in San Francisco, where she was put when you were about two years old. Now the doctor writes that she is stricken with a mortal illness, but has recovered her senses and wishes to see you, her child, before she dies."

"Wa'al, wa'al, of all tales I ever heerd I reckon this is about the strangest!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"Of course I was only too anxious to see the mother from whom I had been separated so long, and when we arrived at the asylum I found her a pale, wan woman, who had once evidently been very beautiful."

"She was so near death when I came that it was only by a superhuman effort that she was able to speak at all, and then her utterances were broken and disjointed."

"My child, you have been fearfully wronged," she said. "Robbed of your birthright, but it is not too late to repair the evil. Susan"—this was Mrs. Thorwood's name—"at the bottom of my trunk, concealed beneath the paper lining, you will find the record of this child's baptism and my marriage-certificate; you must go to a lawyer and have a full account drawn up of how you came to take care of Milicent. You, my child, must take this with the other documents and go to New York. There call upon Lawyer Cadwallader Kingswell, who lives in Gramercy Park, tell him that you are the daughter of Camilla Thorwood, and that on my deathbed I sent you to him in the hope that through his aid you might obtain justice. These were my poor mother's last words," the girl continued, tears starting in her brilliant eyes.

"The effort she had made was too much for her feeble strength, and with a deep-drawn sigh her spirit took its flight to a better world."

Then the girl's emotions overcame her, and she buried her face in her hands for a few minutes, while the tears flowed freely.

"Poor little gal," said Old Sunflower in sympathizing tones.

"Don't take on so; what can't be cured must be endured. Grin and bear it! That is a mighty good saying to live up to now, you had better believe!"

"I don't wonder that you cry, and I s'pose it is a good thing for you, for I have allers heard that a good cry does a woman a heap of good, but you must try and bear up under your trouble. As we say out in the Bitter Creek region, you must try to brace up and have some style about you."

The words seemed to have a soothing effect upon the girl for her sobs ceased, and with her handkerchief she dried her eyes.

"That's right!" Old Sunflower exclaimed in encouraging tones. "Be brave! Hold your head up and fight your troubles! Thar's many a worry in this world which looks to be as big as a mountain when it is a-comin' on, but when we git good and ready to meet it, it turns out to be no bigger than an ant-hill."

"Yes, I understand that," the girl remarked. "And although I do not know that I can pretend to be very brave, yet I am generally light-hearted, and although this is the first serious trouble I have ever had, yet I do not feel at all inclined to yield to despair."

"That is right! never say diel that is the way to git along in this pesky world!" Old Sunflower declared.

"You are right to keep up a stout heart," the young lawyer remarked. "Particularly as you are not in any serious danger, to my thinking. It is one thing to charge a person with a crime, and quite another one to prove it, as will be amply proven in this case before it is ended."

"Oh, yes, you are going to pull through all right—don't you worry a mite about that!" the Westerner declared.

"Go ahead with your story, so as to give Mister Lawyer hyer a chance to git in his fine work."

"Mrs. Thorwood found the documents concealed under the lining of the trunk just as my mother had said, then she went to a lawyer and had a paper drawn up giving all the particulars in regard to how she had taken charge of and brought me up. This, with the other papers, were placed in an envelope, and for security sewed up in the bosom of my dress."

"Mr. and Mrs. Thorwood gave the documents a careful examination, and did not hesitate to say that it was their belief I was going

on a wild-geese chase, so they advised me not to examine the documents until I found Mr. Kingswell in New York.

"It may be possible that your mother is right in her surmise that your introduction to this Mr. Kingswell will lead to important results, but I greatly doubt it," Mr. Thorwood said. "For, as she has been secluded from the world for twenty years, I do not see how it can be possible that she could know anything about the matter."

"She anticipates, I presume, that your father is a wealthy man, but he has never manifested any interest in either his wife or child, and from the little I know of him, I judge that he is one of those men who thinks only of himself."

"He was a speculator when he married your mother, and it was a very foolish match on her part, for she could have had this Mr. Kingswell, who was in every way superior to the other."

"Yes, that is the truth," the young lawyer remarked. "I know something about that episode in my father's life, for one day, a year or so before he died, I came across the picture of a beautiful girl in his desk, upon which, in a delicate woman's hand, was written the name, Camilla, and then he told me the story of how, a few years after my mother's death, he had visited California on business and there made the acquaintance of the original of the picture, 'and we are about as good as engaged,' he said, when a dashing traveling man came along and got her to run away with him."

"Yes, that is what Mrs. Thorwood said, and she added that it was a wild, foolish act on the part of my mother, for none of her relatives knew anything about the man, not even his name, until my mother came back to San Francisco, just before I was born."

"He was seldom at home, and then only for a day or two at a time, and it was supposed that my mother's insanity was brought on by her brooding over his absence."

"When my mother was taken ill, a message was sent to my father, who had gone to Chicago."

"He did not come, but, in his place, a man who said he was my father's cousin, and he told a strange tale."

"My father had made an unfortunate failure, and was so hounded by his creditors that he had fled to Europe, and it was doubtful if he would ever return to this country again; but this man said he would see that my mother had proper care. He would attend to placing her in an asylum and pay the bills as long as she lived."

"As he was a man of wealth, so he explained, he could afford the luxury of helping his cousin's unfortunate wife, now that my father was reduced to poverty and forced like a criminal to fly from the country."

"Wa'al, now, that feller was a right down good sort of a chap, and no mistake!" the Westerner declared.

"He also offered to provide for me, but Mr. and Mrs. Thorwood would not accept of anything, saying that they were rich enough to take care of me."

"A couple more of the right sort," Old Sunflower remarked.

"Only one condition the stranger made, and that was that my poor mother should be entered at the asylum under her maiden name; it was a mere whim on his part, he said, and, although Mr. and Mrs. Thorwood wondered at the suggestion, yet, being a matter of small moment, as it appeared to them, they consented."

"That looks as if there was something back of the man's generosity," Kingswell commented.

"Oh, you kin bet high on that," the Westerner declared. "Men don't take notions of that kind without good reasons for them."

"And has this man paid your mother's bills all these years?" Old Sunflower asked.

"Yes, so Mrs. Thorwood said."

"A mighty strange affair, any way you take it," the Westerner affirmed.

"Now you know why I came to New York," the girl continued.

"My journey was an uneventful one, and I scarcely exchanged words with a single person until after I left Philadelphia; then I got into conversation with a lady who sat in the same seat with me."

"She was a middle-aged, well-dressed woman, and seemed to be very much of a lady."

"I seldom talk with strangers, but, somehow, I allowed the woman to discover that I had no knowledge of New York and had not made up my mind as to which hotel I should go to."

"Then she offered me the hospitality of her flat, saying that her husband was away on business, and, as she was all alone, she would be delighted with my company."

"I am no ignorant country-girl, having lived in a large city all my life, and yet I did not suspect there was anything wrong in her offer, and gladly accepted it."

"That was natural," the young lawyer observed. "An old and experienced woman of the world might be easily deceived by such a plausible tale."

"We went up-town on the L. Road, passed in to the flat—the woman had a key, and the door-keeper was not at his post—ascended by the stairs, instead of the elevator, but as I was not used to elevators in private houses, I did not think our using the stairs was anything odd. Then, after we entered the apartment, I was seized and drugged into insensibility, as I before related."

"I think I kin figger this hyer thing out pretty well," Old Sunflower remarked.

"That was a conspiracy to kill Wolf to git the life insurance money. This Mrs. Wolf, who has lit out so mysteriously, and the strange woman of the train, were both in it, and when the woman met you on the train and discovered that you were a stranger without acquaintances in New York, the idee came to her to get you to the flat, and if you were found there when the death was found out, the chances were great that people would take you to be Mrs. Wolf, and if you succeeded in showing that you wasn't, there would still be a strong suspicion that you had a hand in the death of Wolf."

"You have got the right idea, I think," Kingswell assented.

"It is a strange mystery, and I do not know what to think," the girl remarked.

"These papers which you had concealed were taken from you while you were insensible?" the Westerner asked.

"Yes, but my purse, with over fifty dollars in it, was not touched."

"The game was to take away anything which would go to show that you were not Mrs. Wolf," Old Sunflower asserted.

"They reckoned that the police, thinking when they got you that they had secured Mrs. Wolf, would not trouble themselves to look further and she would have a chance to git out of harm's way," the Westerner continued.

"Give me the address of the Thorwoods and I will communicate with them by telegraph," the young lawyer remarked.

The information was given.

"By the way, we have discovered that Wolf carried a heavy life insurance," Kingswell said.

"So there was a motive for the murder, possibly, and the agent of the company is anxious to send a lawyer to defend you on this murder charge; if they can prove that Wolf committed suicide, they will not have to pay. He requested me to tell you that they will provide a lawyer."

"I would prefer to trust myself to you," the girl replied.

"That is whar your head is level, little gal!" the Westerner exclaimed. "And you kin bet your boots that we will see you through, for that is the kind of hairpins we ar'!"

The two then withdrew, and as they entered the main office they encountered Ned Purchase, one of the most noted of the criminal lawyers of New York, and a particular friend of Kingswell.

"Hello! what are you doing here in the Tombs?" the criminal lawyer exclaimed.

"Ar'n't you out of your element?"

"I am going in to rival you."

"Oho!"

"I have been retained to defend this young woman accused of Wolf's murder."

"The deuce you say! Why, I am here for that purpose!"

"You don't mean it?" Old Sunflower cried.

"Why, I didn't think the gal had a friend in the city, besides myself, and I am standing up for her because she is a stranger."

"You are not the only man in New York with a heart in your body. Doctor Grolance believes that she is unjustly accused, and has retained me to defend her."

"Wa-al, wa-al!" Old Sunflower ejaculated.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WESTERNER'S DETERMINATION.

"I AM giving it to you as straight as a string!" the lawyer declared.

"The doctor takes a big interest in the girl, I tell you! I didn't think we would be able to get an interview with her, for I know that the detectives generally try to keep everybody away from their important prisoners for a few hours so as to give them a chance to worm a confession out of them, but when I told the doctor this, he said he had some friends who had a strong political pull, and he thought he would be able to arrange the matter."

"He is with the warden now, but I am rather doubtful about his being able to work the oracle," the lawyer added.

At this moment the warden entered the room accompanied by Doctor Grolance.

There was a slight look of surprise on the face of Grolance when he saw Old Sunflower, who greeted him with the duck of the head and the beaming smile with which he was accustomed to salute his acquaintances.

In his hand the warden held an open letter.

"Ah, there are the parties now!" the official exclaimed. "This gentleman is anxious to provide a lawyer for this accused girl, but I told him that you had secured the job," and as he spoke he nodded first to the doctor and then to the young lawyer.

"Yes, she has retained me," Kingswell remarked.

"It will not do her any harm to have two lawyers," the doctor argued. "I have become interested in this young woman, for the impression has come to me that she is unjustly accused, and although I am far from being a rich man yet I am prepared to give liberally to secure her release."

"Really, while I should be glad on most occasions to have the advantage of the advice of so eminent a lawyer as Mr. Purchase," and the two lawyers exchanged ceremonious bows, "yet this is a case where I think it is best for me to act alone."

"I presume you would not object to Mr. Purchase and myself seeing the girl?" the doctor asked in an insinuating way. "If she has retained you, that of course cuts us off, but it may be a comfort to the young lady to know that friends are springing up around her in her hour of trial."

"Certainly not!" Kingswell replied. "No objection at all as far as I am concerned."

"Not a mite!" Old Sunflower added. "Jest sail in your elephants! For my part I think it is a good idee! It will put some heart into the leetle gal for her to find out that she ain't a-going to be left to fight her battle all alone by herself."

"I am very much obliged to you for your kindness, gentlemen," the doctor remarked with a polite bow. "And as you say, even if she does not care to accept the assistance which I tender, it will make her feel that she is not without friends although a stranger in this great city."

Then the warden summoned an attendant and gave orders to conduct the pair to the young woman's cell.

The moment the door closed behind the two, Old Sunflower tackled the warden, as he would have expressed.

"Say! I know 'tain't any of my business, but is it possible that soft sawder chap has got a pull?" the Westerner exclaimed.

"So it appears," the official replied.

And then, in a sudden outburst of confidence, he handed the letter which he held to Old Sunflower.

The Westerner read it aloud, and it ran as follows:

"MY DEAR WARDEN:—

"Do what you can for his nibs who brings this. He has a big pull with the *ginny*s in his ward, and I want to keep in with him."

The signature at the bottom of this peculiar epistle was that of one of the saloon politicians of the city, who, by the aid of his ward "heelers," had been able to climb to a place of pelf and power.

"This fellow is a fraud of the first water!" the warden exclaimed, contemptuously. "But just at present he is in high feather at headquarters, and the boss probably wouldn't like it if I didn't do what I could for him."

"The day will come though when the men who run things will be glad enough to kick him out of the party."

"Of course I rely upon you not to give this away, you know."

The pair protested that the warden could trust to their discretion; then they thanked him for his kindness and departed.

And now, in order to dismiss the subject, so as not to be obliged to refer to it again, we will say that the doctor and the criminal lawyer met with an extremely cold reception from the girl.

Despite the doctor's smooth, insinuating way, and his profession of the interest which he took in her, there was something about the man which excited Millicent's distrust.

If she had been pressed to explain why she did not like him, she could only have given the woman's answer—

"Because."

But the feeling, although she could not give a reason for it, was so strong that she declined to have anything to do with the doctor or his lawyer.

She thanked him with distant politeness for his offer, but refused to avail herself of it, saying she was already provided with counsel; so the two were forced to depart unsatisfied.

From the Tombs, Kingswell and the Westerner proceeded to the office of the lawyer, and when they were seated behind doors they discussed what was best to be done.

"What game is this doctor trying to play?" the young lawyer asked.

"As to his being interested in the girl and coming to her rescue because she is a stranger, that is all bosh!"

"Oh, yes! he ain't no sich man!" Old Sunflower declared.

"Some of these educated foreigners are a mighty bad lot, and it strikes me that this cuss is the head devil in this snap. To my notion, he is the man who is running the hull thing."

"It certainly does look that way."

"It is my idee that thar is a gang of 'em in this game, and Wolf's death is the result of as deep a plot as ever the wit of man hatched."

"It is surely a great mystery, and, as you

say, it would seem as if there was a gang at the bottom of it."

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, this Mangood who lent the money on the security of the life insurance, is one, for it is my belief that if Wolf's life hadn't been insured for a big sum he would have been alive to-day."

"I agree with you."

"The first point in the game was to get the life insurance, the next to get Wolf married, then have the wife disappear after the death, so that it would look as though she killed him; that was to prevent the company refusing payment of the money on the ground that he committed suicide."

"Strange, though, that the plotters should have got this girl involved in the affair," Kingswell observed, musingly.

"They may be in jest to mix the thing up, and throw the detectives on a false scent, as I said afore. But from the fact that this doctor has come forward and wants to get on the right side of the gal now, it looks to me as if thar was something up besides the Wolf business. I don't see that it makes any differences to them whether she gits out of this scrape or not—the chances are big, of course, that she will git out, and so I don't see why this feller should want to have a finger in the pie, interfering to get her out of this hole."

"You are right; so far as the Wolf case is concerned, there isn't any reason why any of the plotters should trouble themselves about the girl."

"That is my say-so!" Old Sunflower declared. "But this hyer doctor ain't troubling himself about this leetle gal for nothing, you know, for he isn't that kind of a man; it is my notion that he is a sharper from Sharperville, and I would bet all I am worth on it, too!"

"Yes, I don't think you have made any mistake about that," the young lawyer assented. "He seems to me to be a deep and dangerous man."

"He has got some scheme in his head, or else he wouldn't come near the gal."

"Very likely."

"Now, then, what is it?"

"That's a riddle!"

"Correct! and though you wouldn't think it to look at me, yet I am the gol-darnest cuss to guess riddles that you ever struck!" Old Sunflower asserted.

"Is that possible?"

"Yes, sir ee—hossfly!" the Westerner replied.

"And I reckon I can figger this hyer thing out."

"Thar is a gang in this Wolf business, and I have got my eyes on four of 'em so far. First, thar is the doctor, whom I reckon is the head devil; that is, the man who got up the scheme; then Mangood, who lent the money—it was necessary to git in some respectable feller to advance the money on the life insurance, for if any man with a bad record had put up the cash, Wolf's death would have excited immediate suspicion that thar was something crooked about the thing."

The lawyer admitted that this was probable.

"Then thar ar' two women; the mysterious gal who married Wolf, and this middle-aged party who met the leetle gal on the train."

"The last woman was the one who robbed the girl of the documents she had; she took 'em so as to prevent the gal from proving right in the beginning that she wasn't Mrs. Wolf."

"If she had had the papers to show it would have settled the identity question right off."

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly."

"Now then, hyer is the explanation: The woman took the documents to the doctor, and after he examined them he came to the conclusion thar was some money in the thing for him and his gang, and so he went in to git on good terms with the gal."

"That supposition is a reasonable one," the lawyer remarked, thoughtfully.

"But it rests on two things, though," the Westerner asserted. "And if they ain't all right, it knocks the daylight clean out of my idee."

"The first one is, the documents are valuable, for the leetle gal's father is worth money, or mebber he is dead and left a big estate, which is waiting for an heir; the second p'int is, some one of the gang must know all about the gal, and jest how she is situated, or else the papers would be like so much Greek to them."

"That seems to be correct," Kingswell admitted. "The rascals must have a better knowledge of the girl's affairs than she herself possesses."

"Yas, for she is utterly in the dark. I take it that these Thorwoods ar' kinder stupid, stolid-minded people, who, when they run afoul of a case of this kind, think it wise to envelop it in all the mystery possible."

"Yes, I have met just such folks. It was a terrible blunder to send the girl on here without putting her in possession of the facts that they knew regarding the case. Why, they even kept from her the name of her own father, by advising her not to examine the papers."

"I kin understand the way they argued the thing out," Old Sunflower remarked.

"She was a young gal, not used to going out, and making her own way through the world, and I s'pose they thought that if she knew all about herself, she might allow some one whom she met on her journey to coax the truth from her, and if her story got out, somebody might try to keep her from getting her rights."

"It is probable that they acted upon some such idea, but it was very stupid."

"Wa-al, thar's a big lot of people who allers blunder in that way when anything important comes up," the Westerner declared.

"You see, they had perfect confidence that your father would see her through all right," Old Sunflower continued. "And so they advised her to come directly to him."

"Yes, and the idea that he might not be living never entered their minds."

"Nary time! They took it for granted that he was."

"By their blundering they have mixed the thing up so that it will be difficult to get at the truth. Until the documents are found, it will not be possible to find out about her father."

"By getting at the hospital whar the mother staid for so many years we may find out the name of the man who paid the bills, and so arrive at the knowledge," Old Sunflower suggested.

"By Jove! that is a bright idea!" Kingswell said.

"Oh, yas, I scratch 'em out once in a while!" the Westerner replied, with a grin.

"But I must be going now!" he continued, rising. "I am going to camp on the trail of this Mangood until I find out jest what kind of a rooster he is; so-long!"

And away Old Sunflower went.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MONEY-LENDER.

OLD SUNFLOWER had not told Kingswell how he proposed to proceed to gain the information he desired, but he had a well-defined plan in his mind.

Wolf's valet, the Londoner, Joey Grimshaw, had already given him important tidings, and the Westerner had little doubt that the Englishman would be able to tell him something about the money-lender.

"Mangood is an Englishman too, and it is possible that Grimshaw may have been acquainted with him across the water," the Westerner mused as he took his way to the ale-house, which the valet commonly patronized.

Fortune favored Old Sunflower, for Grimshaw was in the place when he entered.

"I want some information from you," the Westerner said, coming directly to the point. "And if you ar' able to furnish it I will be glad to pay you well."

"Oh, I know as 'ow you are a good paymaster," the Englishman replied with a grin. "And you can depend upon my doing hall I can for you."

"Did you know that your master, Wolf, was carrying twenty thousand dollars' worth of life insurance?"

"You don't mean it!" the valet exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes, it is a fact, and the policy was only taken out a few days before his death."

"Well, now I am astonished!" the Englishman declared.

"Twenty thousand, eh? That is a tidy bit of swag for some one to collar, and I say, gov'ner, doesn't that give a reason for the man's death?" the valet asked, shrewdly.

"It would certainly seem so. Twenty thousand dollars is a big stake, and thar ar' plenty of rascals in a city like this who would not hesitate to put a man out of the way for a great deal less money."

"Of course; this is a big scheme, though, and would have to be handled mighty carefully," Grimshaw observed in a reflective way.

"No common, mean, little scoundrels could manage such a game. The blokes who put up a job of this kind must be at the very top of the heap, or else they would never be able to make a success of it."

"I think you have figgered that out correctly, for that is about the conclusion I reached. From what I have found out about Wolf I am decidedly of the opinion that he was not at all the sort of man to commit suicide."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the valet. "You are right there, gov'ner. He never took his own life. He was too fond of the good things of this world to want to rush out of it."

"E was murdered! There isn't a doubt about hit in my mind, but when I come to speculate as to who did the job then I ham bothered, but now that you 'ave found hout about this life insurance business the thing begins to clear hup a little, for hit shows there was twenty thousand good reasons for somebody to take a crack at him."

"That is just what I think. I don't believe Wolf took his own life. He was murdered, and the men who induced him to take the life-insurance did so with the idea of profit by his death."

"You have got it down to a hair!" the valet declared.

"The man who holds the life insurance is an Englishman by the name of Abraham Mangood."

"Oho! Sheeney Abe, eh?" Grimshaw exclaimed.

"You know him?"

"Oh, yes, I have known the sly old rascal for twenty years, and 'e is just the kind of man to work a crooked scheme of this kind."

"Then he doesn't bear a good reputation?"

"Well, they don't know much about him on this side of the water," the other replied, thoughtfully. "I dare say 'e 'as been all right since 'e crossed the 'erring pond, but 'e 'ad to get hout of the hold country in a 'urry about five years ago."

"How was that?"

"The old rascal was in the 'oss business there, the same as 'e his now, but 'e was a money-lender besides, and 'e made ten times more money hout of that than hat his reg'lar business."

"You see, the way 'e worked hit was to lend the cash to young men who were the 'airs to big estates, but 'adn't come in possession of their property."

"Yes, I understand; I have heard of sich things being worked in England, but it is a game which isn't played in this country."

"The old bloke got in trouble there in some way. I don't quite remember the rights of hit now, but I know there was so big a row kicked hup that 'e 'ad to cut and run."

"I understand that his claim is that he lent Wolf a good deal of money, and Wolf got out the life insurance policy in order to secure him."

"Well, now, gov'nor, in my opinion that is hall in my heye and Betty Martin!" the Englishman declared.

"It is a 'plant,' gov'nor, and Sheeney Abe stands to win a good big stake or else 'e wouldn't be in hit."

"Is he the kind of man who would lend himself to a crooked game if he thought the chances were good it would go through all right and thar was big money in it?"

"Oh, yes, 'e would be only too willing to take a hand in such a game."

"I reckon I will have to interview this 'ar feller, and see what he has to say for himself," Old Sunflower remarked.

"As I have got kinder interested in this matter, I propose to put it through."

"You'll have to keep your peepers skinned for to get the best of Sheeney Abe!" the valet declared.

"He is a Jew, then?"

"Yes, an English Jew from Petticoat Lane, but he is a turn-coat and will not own hup to hit. You will find 'im a reg'lar artful dodger, and the man who gets the best of Sheeney Abe will 'ave to get hup very early in the morn'ing."

"Waal, I reckon that sich an innocent old cuss as I am don't stand much chance, but I will have to do the best I kin," the Westerner replied, with one of his broad grins, and then he departed.

Having Mangood's address, the Westerner proceeded on his mission immediately.

"Now, then, what is this Mangood?" Old Sunflower soliloquized as he went on his way.

"Is he the head schemer—the captain of the gang—the man who got up the game, or is he merely a figure-head through whose aid the insurance business was worked?"

"That is a difficult matter to decide, but I reckon arter I have had a talk with the man, I will be able to make a pretty good guess at the truth."

"I ain't getting ahead very fast, but as I am making some progress, I don't think I ought to complain."

Then the Westerner fell to meditating for a while, but soon his thoughts were put into words, for, like the majority of men who do not make a practice of confiding in others, he talked much to himself.

"Thar is another point in the game which I must look arter," he murmured. "The drug clerk who sold the poison, and who did not appear on the witness stand."

"I must get at him. The druggist said he did not know whar he had gone, but the odds ar' big that he is in the city, and can be found if a man goes about the thing in the right way."

"I reckon thar is something crooked 'bout that 'ar drug-store business," the Westerner remarked, in a meditative way.

"The druggist himself is all right, I think. I reckon thar isn't much doubt but what he was telling the truth as it appeared to him."

"The woman who bought the poison was vailed so that he couldn't get a good look at her face, and all he could swear to was that this gal looked like the one whom he saw."

"The strange thing 'bout the business was the vial with a flaw in it. The druggist identified it without any trouble because the clerk had called his attention to the bottle."

"Now, that looks to me as if it was all a put-up job."

"A vial with a flaw in it, so that it could be quickly and certainly identified, was picked out, then the clerk took occasion to call the drug

gist's attention to it, then the clerk, in the most careless way possible, sold it full of poison to a strange woman, and took care to arrange the thing in such a way that the druggist should know about it.

"That fixed the druggist so he could give testimony, and the clerk cleared out so that he couldn't."

"Oh, that fellow must be hunted up, and if I can succeed in nailing him I am willing to bet a hat that I will strike oil!"

By this time Old Sunflower had reached the neighborhood where the man whom he sought had his place of business.

It was a large livery stable and in the office sat a man whom the Westerner conjectured was the proprietor.

He was a portly, well-preserved man of fifty or thereabouts, very dark-complexioned, and with a decided Jewish cast to his features, having a big nose, thick lips, retreating chin and a decidedly oily expression.

"Oho! if he ain't a sharper then I never saw one!" was the mental exclamation of Old Sunflower as he entered the office.

The man was perusing a newspaper when the Westerner entered, and as he laid it upon his lap the visitor saw that he had been reading an account of the inquest.

"Is this Mr. Mangood?" Old Sunflower asked.

"That is my name, sir; what can I have the pleasure of doing for you to-day?" the Jew responded with elaborate politeness.

"Wa-al, I come to have a leetle talk with you 'bout this hyer Wolf case," Old Sunflower replied.

The other appeared surprised.

CHAPTER XXII.

OLD SUNFLOWER'S IDEA.

"ABOUT the Wolf case?" Mangood said in a questioning tone, and he surveyed the new-comer with a searching gaze as though he would read his very soul.

"Yas, that is what I said, and you mustn't think I am interfering in a business which does not consarn me, for it ain't so," Old Sunflower explained.

"My name is Flowers and I am the man who was with the doctor and the detectives when the body of Wolf was discovered."

"Ah, yes, I read all the particulars in the newspaper. Have the goodness to be seated, Mr. Flowers!" And as he spoke the Jew hastened to place an arm-chair for the Westerner's accommodation, hustling around with as much politeness as though the visitor was a man whose favor he earnestly desired to win.

"Thank you, much obliged!" said Old Sunflower, as he took the chair.

"I have come to see you in regard to this thing because I take a heap of interest in it, now I tell you!"

"I do not wonder at it; it is a very strange case. Poor Mr. Wolf, I knew him well. He and I were on intimate terms; during the last few years we have done much business together, and I always found him to be a gentleman in the highest sense of the word."

"Wa-al, I didn't know much 'bout him," the Westerner remarked.

"Jest a mere acquaintance, you might say, I run across him in the West, and when I come on to York hyer with an idee of roping some New Yorker with money, to go into a leetle speculation with me, I thought of Wolf and went in to hunt him up, and that is how I came to git mixed up in this hyer affair."

"Ah, yes, I see," the Jew remarked, with a bow and a smirk, but all the time he was studying the face of the Westerner intently as though anxious to make out what kind of a man he was.

"I raised a pair of the biggest, all-fired steers that ever was seen, and I reckon I could make a fortune by showing on 'em in a tent if I could get some good man to go in with me."

"Ah, yes, and you thought that Mr. Wolf might be induced to go into the venture."

"Yas, that was my idee, and I think we could have pulled a heap of money out of it too, but the man is dead and gone now, so thar's no chance to make the raffle."

"It must have been quite a disappointment to you," the other remarked in his oily way, and he shook his head as if he wished to indicate that he took a great interest in the matter.

"Oh, wa-al, I didn't allow the thing to worry me. This is a mighty onsart'in world, you know, and we can't keno every time, and if we could, although thar might be a heap of profit, yet thar wouldn't be any fun in the game."

"That is certainly correct," Mangood asserted. "I see, my friend, that you are a philosopher."

"Yas, I allers calculate to take things easy. If they come my way I am mighty thankful for it, and if they don't I am allers glad that they don't turn out worse than they do."

"That is certainly the way to take the world, but few of us though are able to do it."

"I explained 'bout my business with Wolf so you would understand how I came to be mixed up in the affair."

"Yas, I perceive."

"I had to go as witness, you know, and when that fool jury brought in a verdict of murder ag'in' the leetle gal, I felt—gol-darn it all!—as if I would have liked to have smashed the hull lot on 'em!"

"You don't believe she is guilty then?" the Jew asked with his oily smile, and he spoke in an indifferent manner, as though he really took no interest in the matter, but at the same time his keen little eyes were fixed searchingly on the face of the Westerner.

"Not by a jugful!" Old Sunflower responded in the most emphatic manner. "Why, stranger, she didn't kill the man any more than I did."

"Of course the verdict of a coroner's jury does not amount to much, and when it comes to a regular trial her innocence may be made apparent."

"That is jest what I am a-betting on!" Old Sunflower declared.

"You see, I happened to run across a lawyer, arter the inquest was over, who felt as I did 'bout the matter, and we have made up our minds to see the little gal through."

"That certainly is a very fortunate thing for her."

"Yas; and we have gone into the thing to go the hull hog, you bet!" Old Sunflower cried.

"The lawyer chap is going to attend to the legal part, and I am going for to see what I kin do in the detective line."

"The detective line, eh?" the Jew inquired, with an appearance of great interest.

"Yas; that is my leetle game now, and that is what has brought me to see you. You see, Mister Mangood, I have made the discovery that Mister Wolf was carrying a big life insurance policy, and you are interested in the thing."

"Oh, yes, that is the truth, and I will be pleased to give you all the particulars of the matter," the other declared, with an appearance of great frankness.

"It was a regular business transaction, you understand, and there isn't any reason why I or any one else connected with the matter should wish to make any mystery about it."

"Yas, I see. Wa-al, I didn't know but what you might take it into your head that I was interfering in something which didn't consarn me," the Westerner observed.

"Well, under ordinary circumstances it is possible I would not have been willing to speak about the matter; but, since this tragedy occurred, I deem it my duty to give the fullest particulars to any man like yourself who is engaged in trying to unravel the mystery of Wolf's death."

"Wa-al, I don't know as the life insurance business has got much to do with it, anyway," Old Sunflower remarked, meditatively. "But I happened to meet Colonel Normand at the Tombs, where he had gone to tell the gal that his company didn't believe that she had anything to do with Wolf's death, for they reckoned he had committed suicide, and they was willing to furnish a lawyer to defend her."

"Yes; under the circumstances it is natural for the insurance company to get out of paying the policy if they can, but I fancy they will have considerable trouble in proving in a courtroom that Wolf committed suicide," the Jew remarked, in a very decided way.

"Wa-al, I am kinder mixed up 'bout the affair," the Westerner observed, slowly. "The only p'int that I feel real downright certain about is that the gal didn't have anything to do with the man's death."

"You feel satisfied then that she is telling the truth when she says that she is not Mrs. Wolf—you believe her story?"

"Yes, every word of it!" Old Sunflower replied, firmly.

"But it is such a strange, improbable tale," the Jew declared, still earnestly watching the face of the other.

"Wa-al, it is all straight enuff until you come to the New York part of it," the Westerner replied.

"Thar ain't any doubt but what the gal's name is Milicent Thorwood, and that she come from Tacoma, Washington, jest as she says."

"By the time her trial comes on we will have ample proof in regard to that," old Sunflower continued.

"And the odds are big, too, that we will be able to git hold of some of the passengers on the train, so as to be able to prove she arrived in New York jest exactly at the time she says she did," the Westerner added.

"You see, Mister Mangood, if we kin succeed in proving this, it will acquit her for sure, for if the gal is not Mrs. Wolf, she couldn't have any reason for seeking the life of a man whom she did not know."

"Yes, but some of the witnesses testify that she is Mrs. Wolf?" the Jew observed, in a questioning way.

"But there isn't one of them who feels sure of it," Old Sunflower argued. "The most that any of them will say is that they think she looks like the woman who was with Wolf."

"When it comes to a cross-examination, you know, such evidence as that will be bu'sted all to smash!"

"Well, yes, I do not suppose such an identi-

fication would have much weight on a jury. But the story she tells of how she came to go to Wolf's apartments is such a strange one. There does not seem to be any motive for bringing the girl to the house," the Jew observed, in a reflective way, and as he spoke he watched the face of his visitor very closely.

"Say! I reckon you hain't made no study of this hyer case, or you wouldn't make no sich bad break as that!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, an expression of amazement appearing on his honest face.

"Well, have you discovered a motive?" the other asked, appearing to be much surprised.

"Sart'in! no mistake 'bout it! Why, when a man comes to look into the thing, it is as plain as the nose on a man's face."

"Wolf was murdered, and the murder was the result of a deep-laid plot," the Westerner explained.

"He was a hard drinker, and had been on a spree for two or three days, and on the particular day, on the night of which he died, he was in Long Branch on the biggest kind of a racket, but got a message which induced him to come to New York."

"He was pretty full when he started on the six-o'clock train, and arter he got home, a few more drinks would have put him in such a condition that the poison could be easily administered to him; such a dose as settled Wolf could be given without any trouble to a drunken man, and death would come so quickly that he would never know what hurt him."

"Upon my word, you are quite a detective!" the Jew exclaimed, with a short, dry laugh, in which, though, there was very little trace of merriment.

"Ah, now you ar' trying for to git a rig on me!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, with a good-natured grin.

"This hyer thing was easy enuff—any school-boy could have figgered it out jest as well as I have."

A doubtful expression appeared on the face of the Jew, and he shook his head.

"You do not give yourself due credit," he responded. "It is really wonderful—if you have arrived at a correct decision."

"Wa-al, I feel sart'in of it!" the Westerner asserted.

"I reckon thar is a reg'lar gang mixed up in the thing, and the game was all planned carefully in advance!" Old Sunflower remarked, to the intense surprise of the Jew, and despite the command that Mangood had over his features, he could not prevent his feelings from finding expression on his face.

"This is very, very strange!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, yes, it is the toughest old game that I ever run across, but I reckon I am onto it all the same."

"Wolf's wife—this gal that he picked up, nobody knows whar, and married so slyly—was the one who sent the message which brought Wolf from Long Branch to his death."

"In the beginning, I reckon the plotters hadn't calculated upon gitting this Thorwood gal into the thing, but one of the gang—the elderly woman—happened to meet her on the train, and the idee came to her to git her to the flat—dose her—fix the thing so it would appear as if she was Mrs. Wolf, and the police, thinking they had got the right woman, wouldn't bother their heads to look further, and so the real Mrs. Wolf would be able to git up and dust."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE JEW EXPLAINS.

DESPITE his self-control the Jew was visibly disturbed by Old Sunflower's speech.

"Upon my word, sir, you have completely astonished me!" Mangood declared.

"Have you arrived at these conclusions by the result of your own observation, or have you been aided by some detectives?"

"Nary a detective!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, emphatically. "That is the lay I am on myself, and though most people would think I was a reg'lar hayseed detective, yet I reckon I have done first-class work in this hyer case."

"That is correct if there is any truth in your surmises, but, as far as I can see, almost all of it is mere conjecture."

"Wa-al, that is all that any detective kin do—guess at the thing, whether he is an A No. 1 man from Headquarters or a hayseed detective like myself from 'Wayback."

"The gal, you understand, was the chief card in the pack, for it was she that captivated Wolf in the first place and so rendered it possible for the plotters to git at their man."

"Ah, yes, but a crime of this kind is not committed without a motive!" the Jew declared, evidently ill at ease despite his efforts to appear unconcerned.

"Sart'in!" that is as sure as anything can be!" Old Sunflower asserted.

"Well, do you think you have discovered what the motive was?" Mangood asked, carelessly, and yet there was something in the man's manner which made the Westerner think he was deeply interested.

"Oh, yas, I reckon I have made a good guess

at it. When a man is carrying a big life insurance, and suddenly dies by foul means, people are mighty apt to reckon the life insurance business has something to do with it."

"Ah, my dear sir, possibly you do not intend it, but when you make a remark like that it casts a reflection upon me," the Jew remarked in a solemn way, and shaking his head as though he was grieved.

"Oh, I know that, and that is why I came to see you about the matter, for it was my idee that you would be able to make an explanation which would clear your skirts, and, mebbe, give me some ideas to work on."

"Well, as far as I am concerned, I do not fear the strictest investigation, and shall be glad to have a chance to explain how I became interested in the matter," Mangood declared blandly, and with a great effort to appear at his ease.

"Of course I hain't got no right to put you through a cross-examination, but if you had just as lief as not explain I will be glad to hear what you have to say," Old Sunflower remarked with a good-natured grin.

"As I have nothing to conceal about the matter, I am willing that anybody, and everybody, should know all the particulars, for it was a strictly honorable business transaction," the Jew explained with a flourish.

"Sart'in! that is what I reckoned."

I have known Mr. Wolf for a long time, ten or twelve years, and have done business with him for that length of time," the Jew observed.

"When I bought out this stable he had a pair of horses here, and after he came to the conclusion that it would be cheaper for him to hire horses when he wanted them, and disposed of his establishment, I bought it, and afterwards supplied him with all his horses."

"I don't know as you understand how Mr. Wolf was situated in a financial way," Mangood said, abruptly.

"Oh, I reckon I am pretty well posted. He had had money, but got rid of it all, and lived on an allowance paid him by his sister, the rich Widow Macfarland."

A shade passed over the Jew's face at this revelation of Old Sunflower's knowledge, for he had not expected the other to be so well informed.

"That statement is correct; and as Mrs. Macfarland was a very wealthy woman, without children, and no near relative but her younger brother, Wolf, it was the general supposition that, if the brother outlived the sister, he would come in for a handsome fortune."

"Yas, folks ar' allers speculatin' bout things of that kind."

"Well, Wolf was a man who spent his money really before he got it, so he was usually short of cash, and I got in the habit of accommodating him with loans. Finally he got in my debt to the tune of about five thousand dollars; then he wanted to get married, so he said, and made a proposal to me to loan him ten thousand dollars, so he would be independent of his sister, if she didn't like his marrying, and he would insure his life for twenty thousand in my favor."

"That is a very common thing in England, you know, and though at first I was reluctant to go into it, yet Wolf finally persuaded me that it would be a good investment, and so I consented to let him have the money."

"Wa-al, this hyer story seems to be all straight," Old Sunflower observed, in a reflective way.

"I know that transactions of the kind are not common in this country, and I was afraid, after I agreed to go into the speculation, that if anything happened to Wolf, somebody might take the notion into his head that there was something wrong about the matter, so I took particular care to have witnesses present when the money was paid over to Wolf, and to take his notes for the amounts."

"You will perceive that I really do not make anything by his death," the Jew argued. "Although his life is insured in my favor for twenty thousand dollars, yet, as my claim against him is only for fifteen, that is all I will get."

"You perceive, I simply get my own money back, and it would be decidedly to my interest to have Mr. Wolf alive, for then I would not only get a good interest for the use of my money—for he agreed to pay me a much better rate of interest than I could get for the cash elsewhere—but Wolf's custom at my stable was worth a good thousand a year, and when he died I was out that much and will be out every year."

"Wa-al, I reckon you have shown a clean bill of health," the Westerner observed.

"Oh, yes, I am decidedly out of pocket by the man's death, for he had agreed to pay me ten per cent. interest, and I sincerely wish he was alive to carry out the agreement," Mangood declared, with a doleful shake of the head.

"Wa-al, from your showing thar is no doubt that you don't make anything out of the man's death," the Westerner remarked. "But people who don't know the rights of the thing would be apt to think the murder would put more money into your pocket than into anybody else's."

"That is true, but when we come down to evidence, I can very quickly, and conclusively, show that it isn't so. I have Wolf's note for the money I advanced to him, and, as I stated, I also took the precaution to have witnesses present, so that if at any time a question came up about the transaction, I would be able to show to the satisfaction of everybody that it was a straightforward, above-board business affair."

"Oh, yes, of course!" Old Sunflower coincided. "If thar had been anything crooked 'bout the affair, and you was a-trying to fix it so that it wouldn't be smelt out, you couldn't have been more particular." And then the Hayseed Detective, as he had termed himself, grinned at the other in the most innocent way.

For a moment the Jew was puzzled, and he cast a searching glance in the face of the Westerner.

Was this merely a casual remark, or was the stranger incredulous and the observation intended to be a sarcastic one?

The Jew was puzzled and decidedly uneasy, but strove with all his powers to prevent the visitor from ascertaining the fact, and tried to be as civil and agreeable as possible.

"Ah, well, in this uncertain world a man never can tell what may happen, and my great uncle, who brought me up and gave me my business education, always advised me to get on the safe side of all transactions, if it was possible so to do."

"Very good advice, I reckon."

"And I shall have trouble enough about the affair as it is, for the insurance company do not intend to pay if they possibly can get out of it. They will try their best to make out that Wolf committed suicide, and so avoid payment."

"Waal, they can't do that, nohow they kin fix it!" Old Sunflower cried, decidedly.

"The man was murdered. Thar ain't any bit of doubt 'bout it. The only puzzle is as to who committed the crime."

"Ah, yes, that is a riddle, but from the energetic way in which you have gone into the matter, I have little doubt you will succeed in solving the riddle."

"Waal, if I don't it will not be for want of getting a good ready on!" the Westerner declared.

"In fact, I reckon I have got a bit of a clew already."

"Indeed?" exclaimed the Jew, greatly interested, and yet trying to conceal the fact.

"Waal, rally now, I don't know as I ought to call it a clew, for it is only a kind of a suspicion."

"Ah, yes, I see."

"Did you notice the part this Doctor Grolance played in the affair?"

"Oh, yes."

"And he came to the Tombs with a lawyer, too, saying that he had made up his mind the gal was not guilty, and he wanted to help her to get out of the scrape."

"Well, well! a highly commendable action on his part!"

"A mighty suspicious one, I think!" the Westerner exclaimed, sharply.

The Jew looked at the other in surprise.

"Really, I don't understand why the man's humane action should strike you in that way!"

"That is one of them things that is awful hard for a man to explain," Old Sunflower said, slowly.

"I can't tell you why I think so, but I have got the idee that this doctor knows a heap sight more 'bout this thing than he has given out."

"But, according to Wolf's evidence, he was a total stranger to Wolf."

"Wolf may not have known him, but I would be willing to bet a big stake that he knew all about Wolf."

"He is one of the deep kind, and I don't take nary bit of stock in him."

"Wa-al, I'm much obliged to you," the Westerner continued, rising.

"I got the facts I was arter, and though they don't give one any light, still I shall keep on pegging away."

Then, with an elaborate bow, Old Sunflower departed, leaving the Jew in a far from pleasant state of mind.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GRAND DAME AGAIN.

"THAR—I reckon I have given that cuss something to chew on for awhile," Old Sunflower chuckled to himself as he walked down the street.

"The doctor will soon know that I suspect him; that is, if the Jew and he ar' in cahoots, and I am willing to bet a small farm that they ar'."

"Now, then, when a big and ugly dog gits on a man's trail and shows signs of sticking to it, the most of men ar' apt to out with a weepion, if they have got one, and kill the dog."

"Ain't it jest in human natur' for this doctor, when he finds that I have struck his trail, to endeavor to git me off of it? and how better can the thing be done than by laying me out? That's correct! and now, if some crooks don't go for me pretty soon I shall be astonished."

"Mebbe most men wouldn't think it was wise

for me to show my hand after this fashion, but my game is to force the other fellow to show his, and I reckon I will have the best of the show-up."

And then Old Sunflower chuckled.

"In spite of the Jew's efforts to appear unconcerned, I am satisfied that I gave him a pretty bad quarter of an hour. Now, then, what had I best do next?"

And the Westerner fell to meditating.

"The wife—the missing Mrs. Wolf!" he exclaimed, after a few minutes spent in reflection.

"I don't suppose there is much chance of finding her, for the odds are big that the conspirators have got her safely out of the way; still, I may be able to discover something about her, and perhaps can pick up some information of value."

"I ought to have cross-examined Grimshaw, but it is not too late."

And, having come to this determination, Old Sunflower sought the English chop-house again.

The valet was still there, and he immediately inquired if the Westerner had seen Mangood.

"Yes; and I found him to be jest sich an old rascal as you described."

"He is a slippery hold scoundrel, and the man who succeeds in nailing him will 'ave to get hup very early in the morning."

"That is jest the impression I formed of the man; he is a tough customer, and now I would like a leetle more information."

"Hall right, gov'nor. Hany thing I can do for you I will be glad to, for you are the best paymaster I ever struck."

The Old Sunflower inquired concerning Wolf's marriage.

"I can't do much for you in that line, gov'nor," the Englishman replied.

"Has a rule I knew hall that was going on when I was with Mr. Wolf, but taise're marriage business 'e kept to 'imself. I knew there was something hup from the way 'e went hon, and I imagined there was a woman in the case, but I never thought as 'ow 'e was going to 'op the twig in the matrimonial line."

"Let me see," said the Westerner reflectively.

"You left him before he was married?"

"Yes, hand I must say 'e acted 'andsomely with me," the valet declared. "He quite took me by surprise by saying 'e was going to get married, and so 'e wouldn't be able to keep me hany longer, but 'e would give me the best of characters, and a month's wages instead of a warning."

"That was good treatment certainly."

"Oh, yes, I 'av'n hanything to complain of."

"Then you have no idea as to who the girl was?"

"No, excepting that she wasn't of no account, hand Mr. Wolf's sister was fearfully angry when she 'eard about the affair."

"The gang had made up their mind to murder Wolf and they didn't want a sharp-eyed man, like yourself, around, therefore they got him to get rid of you."

"Oh, you can bet a fortune that was the game!" the Englishman declared.

"What sort of a man was Wolf—partial to theaters, and pretty burlesque opera ladies?"

"Yes, he spent a deal of money in that way."

"You were well-acquainted with his haunts?"

"Of course."

"Do you suppose that if you made the attempt thar is any chance for you to find out who this girl was that Wolf married?"

"Well, I don't see why I couldn't do the trick," Grimshaw replied, thoughtfully.

"I ham well-acquainted with hall the 'angers-on of the theaters and concert saloons where Wolf used to go, hand as it is pretty certain that he picked his wife hup in some such place, I don't see any reason why I shouldn't be able to get hat the particulars."

"The woman's first name was Laura, and it seems to me that she must have been a leetle extra or else she would never have fascinated a man like Wolf," the Westerner observed, shrewdly.

"Yes, but when he was in liquor—and 'e 'as been drinking very 'ard during the past year—'e was very soft," the Englishman declared.

"Wa-al, you kin go in and see what you kin do. It will be a hundred in your pocket, and I will pay your expenses besides, if you succeed in getting any information so I can locate the gal."

"I will do my best, gov'nor; you can depend hupon that!" Grimshaw declared.

Then arrangements were made to use the ale-house as a meeting-place, and Old Sunflower departed.

"If he don't make a success of it, then I have made a mistake in my man," the Westerner soliloquized.

"This Laura must have been a kind of a dashy sort of girl, and even in a big city like New York it is not probable that a woman of this kind could suddenly disappear without some of her companions wondering at it, and such girls always have companions; birds of a feather flock togeether," Old Sunflower continued.

"And such birds chatter, too—they can't hold

their tongues to save their lives," he added, with a wise shake of the head.

"A girl of this kind would think it was a great victory to capture such a man as Wolf, and even though she had been cautioned to keep silence by the gang which engineer the game, yet the odds are big that she would not be able to refrain from boasting to some female friend of her conquest, and if the Englishman is lucky enough to run across the right parties, the chances are big that he will learn something about the girl.

"Now then, the next point for me to look after is the drug-clerk."

Straight to the drug-store, where the poison had been bought which had brought death to Wolf, the Westerner proceeded.

And there to the druggist he explained he had become so interested in the Wolf case that he had made up his mind to try and do a little detective business on his own hook, so he wanted to get all the information possible in regard to the drug-clerk, as he intended to try to hunt him up.

The druggist was an agreeable man, and gave all the information he possessed willingly enough.

The clerk was named Louis Klein, a Franco-German by birth, but he had been in this country so long that he spoke English like a native. Had no relatives here, he believed, and lived at a German boarding-house a block down the avenue.

The man had only been with the druggist for a couple of months and had not given satisfaction, for he was negligent and inclined to be dissipated.

"It is the races and the pool-rooms that I blame," the druggist said, in conclusion. "The young man was idiot enough to fool away his money by betting on the horses, and he neglected his duties to run after the gamblers so as to get 'tips' in order to know how to bet, but I judge that he always lost, for only the day before he left, the landlady of the boarding-house was here, dunning him for his board bill."

Old Sunflower thanked the man for the information, and then sought the boarding-house-keeper.

She was a good-natured old German, eager to tell all she knew.

Klein had gone away—across the seas to his own folks at home, maybe—she knew not surely, but from what he said when he left she got the idea that it was so.

He had owed her money—two weeks, but paid up like a gentleman when he went away, and he had plenty more money besides. The right horse had come in first at last, and he had won much money, and she was glad.

The Westerner turned away, a little disappointed.

"The gang paid the fellow a good price, evidently," he mused. "And fixed it so as to get him out of New York as soon as possible."

"It is a wonderfully good piece of work, but it will be mighty strange if I am not able to find a flaw in it somewhere."

"They have undoubtedly got the man to leave New York, but whether they will succeed in keeping him away from the city is a question."

"It is only a question of time, the getting rid of the money, and then he will be apt to return, and I may be able to get at him. I must put the machinery in motion to bring about that result, anyhow."

Old Sunflower was going through a cross-street, and just at this point came to Fifth avenue, where he was compelled to halt on the curbstone to allow the carriages to pass.

But the occupant of one carriage, a costly and elaborate establishment, signaled the driver to halt by the curbstone where the Westerner stood.

It was the grand dame, Mrs. Macfarland, again.

CHAPTER XXV.

A REVELATION.

THE wealthy widow opened the door, and, addressing Old Sunflower, said:

"Will you have the kindness to enter the carriage? I desire to speak with you."

"Certainly," replied the Westerner, wondering at the request, though.

"Are you at liberty to give me an hour or more, for the matter upon which I wish to speak is an important one, and the discussion may take up considerable time."

"Oh, yes, take all the time you like. I am at your service."

Then Mrs. Macfarland spoke to the driver.

"Go through the Park, over High Bridge, and home by way of Riverside."

The man bowed respectfully, and the carriage went on.

The vehicle was a closed one, and a better arrangement for securing absolute privacy for an important interview could hardly be made.

"I regard it as being very fortunate that I happened to see you," the lady remarked.

"Since the conversation which occurred the

other day, something has happened which compels me to seek advice.

"If it was an ordinary case, I should go to my lawyers, but as it isn't, I have come to the conclusion that a man like yourself will be able to be of more assistance to me."

"I shall be glad to oblige you in any way I can," Old Sunflower replied, in his hearty, good-natured style.

"When you came to see me the other day I was considerably puzzled to decide just what kind of a man you were, for there seemed to be something mysterious about you, but now that I have had time to reflect upon the matter, I have come to the conclusion that you are a detective."

"Wa-al, I don't know as I may be considered to be a first-class article in that line, but I am trying to do the best I kin."

"Sir, I do not wish to flatter you in any way; I have nothing to gain by so doing, besides, I am not the kind of woman to descend to anything of the sort, but this I will say, you impressed me as being a sensible, shrewd man whom it would not be easy to deceive, and that under your appearance of rustic roughness, and blunt good nature, you concealed extraordinary abilities."

The Westerner laughed.

"Wa-al, I am glad that you have got so good an opinion of me," he responded.

"Yes, I have, and what is more, although you are a perfect stranger to me, yet I arrived at the belief that you are a man who can be thoroughly trusted."

Old Sunflower looked at the lady for a moment, a peculiar expression on his face, before he spoke and then he said:

"I must say that you are extremely complimentary, and no mistake! And it strikes me as being a very funny thing, too, that a lady like yourself should have such an opinion when the majority of the shrewd, hard-hearted men whom I encounter generally set me down as being a bag of Western wind, a feller jest bubbling over with gas and good-nature, but no sense to boast of, you know."

"These long-headed men of the world sometimes make great mistakes," the lady remarked, contemptuously.

"I was always gifted with a head for business from early childhood, and my father, who was renowned for his ability in finance, declared that I ought to have been a boy," the lady continued.

"Then, too, I have always prided myself upon being an excellent judge of human nature, and I can truthfully say that it is but seldom I have been deceived."

"Wa-al, I will not make any boast about myself, but this I will say, you can trust me and I will do the best I can for you; that you can depend upon."

"Yes, I feel sure of it, and I can tell you, sir, had I not been impressed with the idea that you were no common man on the occasion of our first meeting, I should not have granted you the privilege of an interview."

"I hope, madam, that time will bear out the good opinion you have formed," Old Sunflower remarked with a polite bow.

"I do not have any doubts in regard to that," Mrs. Macfarland remarked, confidently.

"But now to come to business."

"When you came to see me you had a suspicion that the reason I gave my unfortunate brother a regular income was because he was in possession of a secret, the revelation of which would bring shame and mortification to me."

"Yes, that is true, and the reason I had that suspicion was because your brother certainly thought so."

"It is very strange and I do not comprehend it at all!" the lady declared, a shade appearing on her handsome face.

"I have no objection to explaining to you how the information came to me," the Westerner remarked.

"If you will be so kind, and I can assure you I will not try to make any use of the information without your permission."

"Oh, that is all right."

Then Old Sunflower related the particulars of his interview with the valet.

"I know the man and I think he is a reliable fellow," Mrs. Macfarland remarked when the recital was completed.

"He certainly struck me as being so."

"I know that my brother had a peculiar habit of talking to himself when he got very much under the influence of liquor, and, strange to say, no matter how much he had drunk, he never became stupid, as most intoxicated men do."

"Do you think he really believed that you gave him the money as an inducement to remain quiet?" the Westerner asked.

"Yes, this revelation convinces me that it was the truth, though how he could have got such an idea in his head I am at a loss to comprehend, for, as I had no knowledge of any secret existing which I wished to keep from the world, I could not possibly fear a disclosure."

"That is true."

"Since my conversation with you I have been considerably troubled in regard to this affair,

for I could not understand how my brother could have made such a mistake, nor labor under such a delusion as to believe for a single moment that I would degrade myself by paying money to any one to keep from attacking me."

"My family, Mr. Flowers, have always held their heads up proudly in the world, and for the last hundred years our word has been as good as our bond; the withering breath of scandal has never blighted our good name, and in this matter, as I knew there wasn't anything in my past life which I wished to conceal, I was deeply mortified to discover that my own brother should believe, not only that there was, but that I would be base enough to endeavor to buy his silence."

"It certainly is very strange," Old Sunflower observed, in a meditative way.

"Something occurred this morning, though, which I think will give a key to the mystery, and it is in regard to this circumstance that I wish to consult you."

"I'm all attention!"

"In the first place, in order that you may thoroughly understand the matter, I must relate to you a little of my own history."

The Westerner bowed.

"My father was a very wealthy man, and though engrossed in the cares of business, yet thought a great deal of his family, particularly after the death of my mother, which occurred when I was seventeen years old, but as I was a forward girl, my education was so nearly finished that I was able to take charge of the household."

"My brother was a year younger, but even at that early age he had already given my father reason for great uneasiness, and as time went on he did not improve, but, on the contrary, grew worse, and before he was twenty-three he had so exasperated my father by his wildness that he seriously contemplated turning him out of the house and compelling him to look out for himself."

"Judging from what I have learned of the gentleman, I should think that he must have been a great trial to his father."

"He was—not really vicious, you know, not a man who would do anything really bad, only wild and heedless, throwing his money away as though it was so much water."

"Young fellows with rich fathers will do that sort of a thing once in a while," Old Sunflower observed.

"Of course, it was naturally supposed by those in our own circle who were acquainted with our family affairs that, at my father's death, I would inherit about all of his fortune, for he made no secret of his intention to leave my brother but a small portion."

"He talked the matter over with me, telling me of his plans."

"I will only leave Udolpho a few thousand," he said, "and the rest will go to you; he will soon squander his share, and then you will have a check on him, for you can give him what money you like, and so compel him to behave himself."

"That was kinder putting him under bonds," the Westerner remarked, with a chuckle.

"These circumstances being known, as I said, the fact that I was to inherit my father's millions gave me plenty of suitors; then, too, I was far from being ugly, and possessed many accomplishments likely to prove attractive to gentlemen, as any girl in my set; so I was favored with plenty of suitors, but I remained heart-free until I was over twenty-five, and then just as everybody had made up their minds that I was cut out for an old maid, I met my fate."

"The right man comes to most every woman sooner or later."

"The gentleman was from the West, a speculator, Robert Bruce Macfarland by name."

"He came to New York as the agent of a new Western railroad, and visited my father at his office in Wall street for the purpose of getting him interested in the road."

"I happened to be at the office at the time, and at first sight I fell in love with the man. It was one of those strange fancies that women will take, you know," the lady added, with a smile.

"Oh, yes, certainly; there is no accounting for tastes."

"I had rejected the suits of a dozen of the most prominent men in New York, young and old, and here I was impressed at first sight by a stranger with hardly a dollar."

"When a man or woman really falls in love they do not stop to calculate about things of that kind."

"Although my father was averse to taking any interest in the scheme—he was getting old and conservative—yet I saw immediately that it would prove to be a good thing if properly handled, and I got the impression that the gentleman would make a great success out of it if he had money enough to carry it through."

"Mebbe if you had not taken a fancy to the man, you would not have had so good an opinion of the scheme," Old Sunflower remarked, with a grin.

"Very likely," the lady admitted.

"I persuaded my father to take an interest, and as I had money of my own, I also invested

heavily; not only that, but being on intimate terms with some of the solid men of Wall street, I got them to become interested in the matter.

"It was a great success, and every one interested made money, and the success made the New Yorkers look upon Macfarland as one of the coming men.

"Everything he touched seemed to prosper."

CHAPTER XXVI.

GETTING AT THE TRUTH.

OLD SUNFLOWER nodded his head and looked wise.

"I reckon he had your money at his back to help him on," he observed.

"Yes, it was my aid which made him what he was. He understood that, and it was not long before we were married.

"I am of a proud, impetuous nature, and owing to the fortunate way in which I was situated, was able to accomplish about all of my desires.

"He was the only man that I ever fancied without any difficulty, but after my marriage I came to the conclusion that my husband did not care one-half as much for me as I did for him.

"I was not greatly troubled by this," she continued in a proud, disdainful way. "For I soon made the discovery that my husband was one of those peculiar men who would not be apt to fall deeply in love with any woman, it was not in his nature, and I was honest enough to admit to myself that the chances were great, if I had not been an heiress, and the woman to whom he was indebted for his position, he would never have even dreamed of marrying me."

"It is always better to look a truth of that kind right in the face, than to attempt to beat about the bush," the Westerner remarked in a sober way.

"So I believe, and I will say that I was not particularly disappointed either," the lady declared in her cool, precise way.

"I was not a romantic girl who expected a Romeo for a husband.

"I wanted the man and I got him, and I will do him the justice to say that he made me a good husband during the ten years of our married life, but some way there always seemed to be a little sort of a cloud between us.

"I can't exactly explain it, but I presume it arose from the fact that he was cold and indifferent to womankind by nature, and I had expected something else. But our idols in this world usually turn out to be clay," the lady continued with a curl of her proud lip. "And as it was not possible for the man to change his nature I did not complain.

"He always treated me well, and we seldom failed to agree, and when we did not, we didn't quarrel, and almost invariably he yielded to my wishes, so our married life could not be said to be an unhappy one, although, as I said, there seemed to be something lacking.

"The explanation in regard to that came, I think, this morning."

"Now you are getting interesting," Old Sunflower observed, rubbing his hands softly together.

"A gentleman called upon me and requested an interview upon important private business.

"As a rule I do not receive strangers until I know what the nature of their business is, and I sent a message to that effect.

"The reply made was that the business concerned my late husband and was very important indeed.

"My curiosity was excited and so I received the gentleman.

"He was a man of forty or thereabouts, with a peculiar pointed yellow beard and a foreign air."

Old Sunflower was on the alert immediately. "Spoke with a slight foreign accent? hardly perceptible, just about enough to indicate that English was not his mother tongue, and had a peculiar way of pulling at the under part of his beard every now and then?"

"Yes, that is correct!" exclaimed Mrs. Macfarland, considerably amazed.

"I reckon I know the man, and I must say that it is mighty odd how these things will turn out!" the Westerner asserted.

"Hyer I have been groping in the dark with hardly a ray of light to help me out, but now I reckon thar is going to be a change.

"Go ahead! if this is my man he has made the biggest kind of a mistake in coming to you," Old Sunflower continued.

"But then it is a very natural one for him to have made under the circumstances, for it isn't likely he could have any suspicion that you would consult me about the matter."

"He proceeded promptly to business, by asking me if I was acquainted with the particulars of my husband's early life.

"I replied in the negative, adding that as it mattered not to me I had never troubled my head about the matter.

"Madam, will you excuse me if I speak plainly about this matter?" he said.

"Certainly, speak as plainly as you like," I replied, for I thought this statement was merely to excite my interest."

"It was a kind of a bluff, as we say out West."

"Were you aware that Mr. Macfarland was a married man when you met him?" he asked.

"Although taken completely by surprise, for I had not expected anything of the sort, I did not allow the man to perceive that he had startled me, and replied that I had no knowledge of anything of the kind.

"Well, madam," he said, "I regret, for your sake, to be obliged to tell you that it is the truth. Mr. Macfarland was a married man when he came to New York and made your acquaintance; he was a married man when he wedded you, and by the act he committed bigamy. When he died he left two widows behind him."

"A pretty strong statement."

"I replied quietly that it was one thing to tell such a story and another to prove it."

"That was the way to give it to him!"

"Then he handed me this memorandum," and as she spoke Mrs. Macfarland took a folded sheet of note-paper from her pocketbook and handed it to Old Sunflower.

"I have noted down all the points here," he continued.

"Your husband not only had a wife living at the time he married you but a daughter also, and that child, of course, is the heir to the estate her father left, which is now enjoyed by you.

"These facts came to the knowledge of a legal friend of mine in the West, and he deputed me to see you about the matter."

"And then this unblushing rascal went on to say:

"My friend and I are in this matter for the money that is to be made out of it, you understand, and we do not take the slightest interest in the girl."

"All the proofs of her birth are in our hands, and if we can agree on a price we will be glad to turn them over to you."

"The miserable scoundrel!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"Yes, my first impulse was to order the man from the house, and then I suddenly remembered you, and the thought came to me that, if I placed the matter in your hands, you might be able to entrap the scoundrels, for even if the statement was truth, it was evident to me that some foul play had been committed, or else they would not have known anything about the affair."

"Oh, yes, scoundrels of this kind never got into the matter in an honest way."

"So I concealed my real feelings under the mask of unbelief; telling the man that the tale seemed to be an incredible one and I was not willing to believe it could be true, until I ascertained beyond the shadow of a doubt that it was so."

"That was the way to put it!"

"He replied that it was only natural I should doubt, and he and his legal friend were quite willing I should look into the matter."

"Make a careful examination," he said. "And after you have satisfied yourself that I have spoken the truth, send for me and we will arrange so the truth will never leak out."

"Then he departed."

"Evidently a first-class rascal in every respect!" Old Sunflower declared.

"The miserable scoundrel! To think for a moment that I would be a party to any such vile bargain!" Mrs. Macfarland exclaimed, indignantly.

"The fellows reckoned that two points were in their favor. In the first place they thought that, though you had plenty of money of your own, yet you would not be willing to give up what came to you from your husband."

"The wretches!" the lady exclaimed. "I am worth more money in my own right than I know what to do with, and why should I care for the few thousands which came to me from my husband? He was not a wealthy man, for he met with severe losses the year in which he died, and if I had not come to his assistance he would have failed."

"The second point was that you were never legally Macfarland's wife, and they believe you would pay liberally to keep that fact from the public."

"The idea is a monstrous one!" the lady cried, in fiery indignation.

"Am I to blame because my husband was a rascal—I, the victim of his crime?"

"The thought is absurd! Under such a cloud as that I could walk with upright head; although, really, I suppose that, in a measure, it was my fault."

"I bought the man with my money. By marrying he insured his financial success, and he was not strong enough to withstand the temptation."

"But any one who thinks I would shrink from the gaze of the world because I have been wronged in such a fearful way, knows but little of me."

"Should I be weak enough to commit a shameful act, then I might seek to hide myself away where none of my former friends and acquaintances could find me, but when I am a helpless victim, I deserve the world's sympathy and not its reproach."

"You are looking at the matter in the right

light!" Old Sunflower declared. "Thar's no mistake about that!"

"I can understand now the shadow that there was between my husband and myself," the lady remarked, in a sad tone.

"I was conscious that it was there almost from the moment of our marriage, but could not understand the reason for it."

"The man knew he had committed a crime, and the thought haunting him, produced the shadow."

"Yes, I understand now, but I never had any suspicion that anything was wrong, because he was an odd and peculiar man, and really seemed to be almost destitute of natural affection, a perfect slave to business, and after we were married, all he seemed to care for was to accumulate money."

"He admitted to me once that it was his ambition to become the greatest railway king in the country."

"I am not particularly affectionate myself, and so I did not notice the lack of love in him as an ordinary woman might."

"I don't doubt though that he was often worried by thoughts of his first wife."

"Yes, she was shut up in a living tomb!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

GATHERING UP THE THREADS.

"A most terrible fate!" Mrs. Macfarland continued. "But, of course, that was not his fault, and his wife's condition possibly offers some little excuse for the wrong which he did me."

"She was a hopeless lunatic, and according to this memorandum had been confined for over five years in an asylum when he met me."

"He went on the idea that it was just the same as though she was dead," the Westerner observed.

"Still it was a terrible blunder for the man to make, and I wonder that he did not get a divorce from her," Old Sunflower continued, musingly. "Of course, under the circumstances he really had no right to get a divorce. Still such things are done every day."

"I presume he feared that if he attempted any legal proceedings the truth in regard to the matter would come out," Mrs. Macfarland observed.

"The newspaper men are always on the lookout for a sensation, and they, undoubtedly, would not have missed getting hold of such a scandal."

"You must bear in mind that Robert Bruce Macfarland, the great New York railway king, was quite another person from Macfarland, the Western speculator, and although the press would not have troubled itself about a common, unknown man, seeking to be freed from an insane wife, they most surely would have devoted much space to an account of the railway king's troubles."

"Yes, that is true enough. He reckoned that there wasn't much danger of the truth coming out, and so resolved to go ahead and risk it."

"And as events proved he was wise in so deciding."

"I knew that he was paying the bills of an insane woman confined in a Western lunatic asylum, for he made no secret of the matter to me, but as he explained that the woman was his niece, the daughter of an elder sister who, with her husband, had been killed in a railway accident in the West, leaving the girl without a natural protector, I never thought of questioning the truth of the tale."

"He evidently feared that if by any chance a knowledge of the fact should come to you, your suspicions might be excited and, possibly, you might make an examination into the matter, whereas if he told a plausible tale, you would be likely to accept it as the truth," Old Sunflower remarked in his shrewd way.

"Yes, he doubtless reasoned after that fashion," Mrs. Macfarland observed.

"Well, he was certainly right. For ten years we lived as man and wife, and I never had a suspicion that all was not right; but now that my eyes are opened I begin to understand certain things which puzzled me."

"My husband died very suddenly—heart-failure, due to the untiring energy he displayed in his business! the doctor said."

"He was stricken down at a time when I was absent from the city, became delirious, and my brother volunteered to take charge of him until I could come."

"In five hours from the time of the attack I was at the bedside, but it was too late; he had breathed his last just as I entered the house."

"He seemed to be very much worried in regard to this woman who is in the asylum," my brother explained to me, as soon as we were alone, and talked of nothing else."

"He knew not what he said, of course," I replied, "because if he had been in possession of his senses he would have known that I would have attended to her just the same as he had done, and there was no necessity for his giving me any instructions in regard to the matter."

"Well, well, you are one woman picked out of ten thousand!" Udolpho declared.

"I did not pay any particular attention to the speech, for my brother had been drinking and I did not consider that he knew what he was saying, but now I understand."

"Yes, yes, in his delirium your husband betrayed his secret, and your brother jumped to the conclusion that you knew all about the matter."

"Undoubtedly, and I am astonished that he should think so meanly of me as to believe I would have remained a single hour with Robert Macfarland as his wife if I had known the truth about the unfortunate woman in the asylum."

"Some men are not gifted with a nice sense of honor, and I judge from what I have learned of your brother that his indulgence in liquor had rather blunted his natural sensibilities."

"Yes, he certainly was guilty of actions during the past ten years of his life which no gentleman could have performed."

"The man was my only brother and now fills an untimely grave, but that is no reason why the truth should not be spoken," Mrs. Macfarland remarked, in her firm, decisive way.

"A few months after my husband's death, Udolpho made a trip to the West, and when he returned he told me that he had been as far as San Francisco."

"I went to the asylum there," he said, "just for the purpose of seeing how the woman was getting along."

"I wonder at your taking the trouble," I remarked, for it was an uncommon act for him to perform."

"Oh, I did it just out of curiosity," he replied. "She is doing nicely although hopelessly insane. And then he said, abruptly, 'Don't you think you are rich enough to afford to give me a regular allowance? My money is all gone, and although father only left me a beggarly sum, yet I am sure he believed that you would always see that I did not want for anything.'"

"You can afford to be liberal with me, and you can depend upon my discretion in regard to this California business."

"That was intended as a threat that if you did not grant him an allowance he would reveal the truth," the Westerner remarked.

"He did not speak right out, for he believed you were acquainted with all the particulars, and thought you would understand what he meant. He wanted an allowance as the price of his silence regarding your husband's maniac wife."

"Yes, now that this revelation has been made to me I understand all about it, but at the time I was as innocent as a child regarding his real meaning," the lady observed.

"He had been drinking and I thought that fact accounted for his peculiar speech, so I paid no attention to it."

"I had made up my mind some time before to give him a regular allowance, and so I was glad that he spoke as he did."

"But when you complied with his request he made the mistake of thinking that you did so through fear."

"Yes, and the thought was a monstrous one!" the lady declared, her proud lip curling in scorn and her brilliant eyes flashing fire.

"I cannot understand how it could be possible for my own brother to so terribly misunderstand me."

"Well, there isn't much use to say anything against the man as long as he is dead and gone, but as far as I can find out he wasn't of much good to himself or anybody else."

"Although I do not deny that if the truth had been made public the blow would have been a severe one, yet I would not have paid any one a penny to suppress the publication!" Mrs. Macfarland declared.

"I judge then that you do not propose to tamely submit to be blackmailed now," Old Sunflower remarked in a reflective way.

"No, I do not; and what is more I should like to be able to punish these rascals for daring to attempt such a thing," the lady replied with great spirit.

"And that is the reason why I think it would be better to consult a man like yourself about the matter, rather than intrust it to the hands of my regular lawyer."

"Wa'al, as it happens, jest by accident, you couldn't have picked out a man able to handle the case better than myself!" Old Sunflower exclaimed.

"I was in possession of a certain amount of information—not enough to enable me to do much—but now that you have told your story I think I understand the hull scheme jest about as well as though I had been one of the original plotters."

Then he consulted the memorandum. "Robert Bruce Macfarland married to Camilla Thorwood in San Francisco, California, one child—a girl, the issue of the marriage."

"The wife becomes insane and is placed in an asylum—but the party has neglected to state though that this woman died about two weeks ago."

"Is that true?"

"Yes; in time you would have received noti-

fication through the lawyers to attend to the asylum bills, no doubt.

"Now then, this child is now a grown girl; she is here in New York and in the Tombs prison, accused of murdering your unfortunate brother."

"Is it possible?" Mrs. Macfarland exclaimed, in profound amazement.

"It is. Milicent Thorwood is the child of your dead husband, and now accused of being the girl who married your brother and then killed him."

"The similarity of the name did not occur to me; but the girl is telling the truth, is she not, when she declares that she knows nothing about my brother?"

"Yes; she was entrapped by the gang who committed the murder, so as to give time for the real Mrs. Wolf to get out of the reach of the police."

The Westerner then related Milicent's strange story.

"After drugging the girl, she was searched so that anything she might have on her person which would help to prove who she was, could be removed; then the documents were found, and the gang, with their knowledge of Wolf and your family matters, saw immediately that there was a chance for them to make a stake."

"Your brother's life was insured for twenty thousand dollars; he was duped into a marriage with some vile adventuress and then killed through her aid, so as to get the insurance money, and now, by means of this secret, the scoundrels want to extort hush-money from you."

"But as you are in possession of these facts, can you not bring these scoundrels to justice?" Mrs. Macfarland exclaimed, in a state of great excitement.

"If you need money, call on me freely—I would gladly spend thousands of dollars to defeat the plans of these vile men, and as for this girl—I am a childless woman, and she shall be my daughter if she is willing to accept me for her mother!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OLD SUNFLOWER'S SCHEME.

MRS. MACFARLAND drew herself up proudly as she made the statement.

"Madam, the offer does credit both to your head and heart!" Old Sunflower declared, warmly.

"Heaven denied me children, yet all my married life I have hungered for a daughter's love, and now, lo and behold! here comes from the far West a fresh young heart to comfort me in my old age."

"I do not doubt that the girl will be glad to accept the offer," the Westerner remarked.

"I have not had an opportunity to become well acquainted with her," Old Sunflower continued. "But from what I have seen I believe she is a sweet, lovable girl—a daughter such as any mother might take just pride in possessing."

"She must be released from that dreadful prison immediately!" the lady declared. "I will give you *carte blanche* to attend to the matter. If she needs bondsmen, I can get fifty and for any amount. Don't hesitate to call for money, for I will gladly spend thousands, if necessary, to aid this unfortunate child entangled in the dreadful snare."

"That is a good old biblical saying about 'One who neteth even the fall of a sparrow,'" observed Old Sunflower. "And though the poor girl was all alone hyer in a big overgrown city, without a soul whom she knew to call upon for help in her dire extremity, yet friends sprung up willing and able to aid her."

"Oh, there is some justice in the world, after all!" the lady exclaimed, clasping her hands together in thankfulness.

"Yas, yas; 'tain't so bad a world, although thar is a lot of awful mean critters in it."

"I was a friend, for one, as I had made up my mind to see what I could do in the detective line in the case, and so it was only natural I should become interested in the leetle gal, as I jumped to the conclusion right at the beginning that she was innocent."

"Then there was a young lawyer whom I happened to run across—he doesn't pretend to be much of a lawyer, for he is a Gramercy Park man with an independent fortune, and only practices law for the fun of the thing, but he is really an able man, and with his influential standing in New York can be considered one of the big guns; so you see, Heaven did not intend the gal should suffer for want of friends."

"I am glad of it! It makes me have a better opinion of mankind."

"Oh, yas; the world is a pretty fair one, arter all!" Old Sunflower declared.

"Can you not arrange for me to go to the girl at once?" the lady exclaimed, all her lofty haughtiness vanishing and a nervous, feverish excitement taking its place.

"I long to clasp her in my arms and tell her that for years I have longed for a daughter such as she can be to me."

"I care not how soon the secret becomes pub-

lic. The world may indulge in their gossip and my enemies gloat over the fact that with all my haughty pride I was made a victim and wronged as foully as a woman could be. I am willing to do anything—brave anything to fold this poor, helpless child to my heart!"

The Westerner was visibly affected by the impetuous speech, and that the grand dame was fully in earnest was apparent.

She cared not for the sneers of the world of which she was such a particularly bright and shining light, and Old Sunflower was seized with a profound admiration for this woman who was meeting her trials so bravely.

"My dear madam, if you will allow me to advise you, I would recommend you not to go near the prison, for the gang who killed Wolf and wish to blackmail you will be sure to discover the fact, and then they will understand that part of their game will not work, and it will probably put them on their guard so that it will not be so easy for me to trap them."

"The man who visited you is, I think, the leader of the scoundrels. He is the Doctor Grolance who figured so prominently in the discovery of your brother's death."

"Yes, I believe you are right—there is reason in what you say," Mrs. Macfarland observed, thoughtfully.

"It is my game at present to lead the rascals on—to allow them to think that everything is going on all right; then they will not be on their guard, and may make some false move so as to give me a chance at them."

"The leetle gal can be released on bail, of course, that will not alarm the scoundrels, for they will expect that."

"They haven't any idea, you see, of trying to have the gal convicted of the murder; they fixed the thing so the gal would be accused in order to head off the insurance company, which will try to avoid paying the death claim on the ground that your brother committed suicide, but if a court decides that he was murdered, they can collect the insurance money all right."

"I understand."

"After the gal is released on bail I am going to work the trick so as to have her mysteriously disappear, and that will be apt to bother the gang."

"Yes, yes, the idea is a good one."

"I can arrange the matter so that she can go to some secure retreat, and there you can see her, but my game is to fix the matter so the gang will not suspect that you and the gal have come together, or that you have any knowledge in regard to her whereabouts."

"Now I have a part for you to play, and if you will do it, I have no doubt I can trap my birds."

"I will gladly aid you in any way in my power!" the lady replied, promptly.

"After a couple of days—allow time for you to telegraph to San Francisco and look into this asylum business, you know—you must send for this man and ask how much he will charge to procure all the proofs that this girl is your husband's daughter and place them in your hands, so that it will not be possible for the girl to prove who she is."

"Yes, yes," Mrs. Macfarland exclaimed, listening eagerly.

"These proofs are already in their hands, and they got them by robbing the gal on the night of the murder."

"They must be mighty long-headed rascals to suspect that there is any truth in this, for it is the very thing that a woman, who was willing to pay money to hush the matter up, would be almost certain to do."

"True, very true!"

"They will probably demand a large sum of money, and you must higgler over the matter, and endeavor to beat them down, just as a woman who loved money would be apt to do."

"You can trust me to play the part to perfection!" the lady declared. "Although it is one utterly foreign to my nature."

"The trick will be to catch the fellows with the documents in their possession, and then they will be put upon the rack to explain how it is that they have these papers, which were in Milicent Thorwood's possession when she arrived in New York on the night of the murder."

"It is a capital scheme, and will surely succeed!" Mrs. Macfarland declared.

"It will put them in a hole, and by that time, too, something else may turn up to help me along. I have men at work covering some important p'int, and some one on 'em may turn up trumps."

"Very well, I will be governed by your advice in this matter, and you can rely upon my following your instructions to the letter."

"Let me see! we must arrange a way to communicate without anybody being able to discover that we ar' up to any sich dodge," Old Sunflower remarked, thoughtfully.

"I am at the Astor House; if you should want to see me, drop me a line and your carriage can pick me up in the Park somewhere, and if I want to see you I can write and make the same arrangement."

The lady thought the plan a good one and said as much.

By this time the carriage was well on its homeward road, and as it passed under the "L" road Old Sunflower got out and took a train for downtown.

He felt decidedly pleased at the prospect and chuckled gleefully to himself.

"I am on the trail at last, and dog-gone me if I don't stick to it until I tree my game."

At Twenty-third street he left the train and as he gained the sidewalk, came face to face with the sly and oily Englishman, Joey Grimshaw.

"Well, now, if this 'ere ain't a piece of luck!" Grimshaw exclaimed.

"Do you know, gov'ner, I was just a-wishing I could run across you."

"Hyer I am—got any news?"

"Oh, I am chock-full of news!" the other exclaimed, exultantly.

"That is good!"

"Come to a chop-house! somebody might spot us on the street."

When they were snugly seated in a quiet corner with a couple of tobies of ale before them the Englishman began:

"Arter you left I put hon my thinking-cap, you know, gov'ner, hand then I remembered that this 'ere Mangood was a great cove to sport 'round with the comic opera girls, and there was a sporting drum down on Sixth avenue, a saloon and restaurant combined, which his a popular resort for the shady kind of stage-people, hand the hold Jew generally dropped in there to 'ave a glass of something about midnight arter the theaters are hover."

"Now, as Wolf and the hold Jew were pretty thick, I took the notion into my head that maybe the hold Sheeney 'ad introduced Wolf to this Sixth avenue place."

"And he had, eh?"

"Right you are, gov'ner! I knew about hall of the waiters in the place and so I didn't 'ave any trouble in getting what I wanted."

"Good, good!"

"Laura Lake is the gal I think, a serio-comic singer in the variety line; a great friend of the hold Jew, and by him introduced to Wolf."

"Now, she is gone; but the night before she went she told one of her pals, and the waiter caught onto it, as 'ow she had married a swell with a pot of money and was to sail on the San Jacinto for New Orleans in the morning."

"I can nail her easily enough at New Orleans then!" Old Sunflower declared with a chuckle.

A newsboy came into the saloon.

"'Ere's yer extry!" he cried. "Horrible steamer accident. The San Jacinto lost with all on board on the Florida Coast."

"Tarnation!" cried Old Sunflower in the deepest kind of disgust.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ON A NEW TRACK.

THE Westerner bought a paper and eagerly perused the account of the wreck.

It was merely a telegraphic report from Key West.

Old Sunflower read it aloud, and it ran as follows:

"KEY WEST, FLA."

"A fishing craft, just arrived, reports that during the storm of last night, which in this neighborhood was a perfect hurricane, a large steamer struck on the dangerous reefs known as Southeast Keys and went to pieces."

"From the wreck which came ashore it appears that the steamer was the San Jacinto from New York for New Orleans."

"All on board are believed to be lost as the tempest was so fearful that it was not possible for the stanchest life-boat to have lived in the angry waters."

"Well, well! blow me tight, gov'ner, if this ain't one hof the rummiest goes that I ever 'eard hof in hall my born days!" the Englishman declared.

"It is a piece of bad luck, and no mistake," the Westerner remarked.

"I was just thinking, as the lad came hin, 'ow nicely the trick could be worked."

"The duffers got the gal on board hof the blooming steamer, and were chuckling hover the idea that they 'ad got 'er so safely hout of the way that nobody would be able to tell what 'ad become of 'er; but then you got on the blarsted track, and, by using the telegraph, you could fix the business so the gal would be touched on the shoulder by a dandy detective as soon as she attempted to go ashore hat New Orleans, with the polite intimation—"I am sorry to trouble you, Mrs. Wolf, but you hare 'wanted.'"

"Yes, that is just about the programme I proposed to carry out, but it is knocked in the head now," the Westerner remarked.

"It rather upsets you, eh, gov'ner?"

"Wa-al, it does, now, for a fact," Old Sunflower admitted.

"But I am one of those men who, when one speculation bu'sts up, twists round as quickly as possible and starts on a new tack."

"That is a sensible idea."

"Oh, yes; I am jest chock-full of good, hard hoss-sense, as you will diskiver arter you git well acquainted with me."

"I reckoned that you had struck a big thing when you got the particulars 'bout this gal, but

since Fate has ordained that we can't go ahead on that line, we must try our luck in some other way."

"Do you take any interest in hoss-racing—ever go in to win a small farm by picking out the winner?" the Westerner asked, abruptly.

"Oh, yes; I 'ave a deal of sporting blood, you know," the Englishman replied. "And for a good ten years I 'ave followed the races both 'ere and bat 'ome; but I can't say as 'ow I 'ave ever made much money at that sort of thing."

"No; the bookmakers are the men who git the stamps in the long run."

"Yes; it is 'ard work to beat the men who are in the ring, but though I know that the hods are against me, yet I can't 'elp taking a flyer every now and then."

"You are pretty well acquainted then, I take it, with the places whar the sporting-men hang out?"

"Gov'ner, you 'ave come to the right shop for information!" the valet declared.

"You are jest the man I want!" Old Sunflower affirmed.

And then he explained how anxious he was to discover the drug-clerk who had sold the poison to the vailed woman, and told of the information which he had secured from the German in regard to the man's habits.

"I think I twigs, gov'ner," the Englishman declared, with a knowing look.

"You 'ave got the notion into your noddle that this 'ere young man with the sporting blood is not as square as 'e might be?"

"Yes, I have kinder got a sneaking notion that way," the other replied.

"A man on a salary of twelve, or fifteen dollars a week who indulges in such an expensive amusement as endeavoring to beat the bookmakers, would be mighty sart'in to be in Queer street 'bout all the time, and if a gang was looking for a man to do a leetle bit of crooked work, such a galoot would be the very one they would be apt to pick out."

"Oh, yes, there isn't hany mistake about that. A cove who throws away his money trying to pick the winners, is certain to find himself in so big a 'ole that he will be glad to do halmost hany-thing to get hout of it."

"That is the idee I am going on."

"I will try my luck, gov'ner, and hif the cove is in New York, and in the 'abit of 'anging hout round the pool-rooms, there isn't much doubt but what I will be able to spot 'im!" the Englishman asserted, confidently.

"If I kin git hold of the man I may be able to git some information out of him," the Westerner remarked.

"Oh, hit is safe betting that you can do the trick," the valet declared.

"If 'e was in the game, 'e was honly used as a tool; there was so much money in the thing for 'im, and when you get 'old of 'im, and make an hoffer to do the right thing by 'im hif 'e will give the trick away, the hods are big that 'e will jump at the chance to make a stake."

"I think the prospect is good that I will be able to get something out of the man if I am lucky enough to be able to find him."

"No doubt I will be able to spot 'im unless 'e 'as cut hand run!"

"Do the best you can, and if you need money, don't hesitate to call on me, for in a case of this kind I don't grudge expenses."

The Englishman responded that he knew by experience that the Westerner was a good paymaster, and then the two parted.

Old Sunflower meditated over the situation as he went on his way.

"The wreck of the steamer was a bit of bad luck," he soliloquized.

"Still there is no certainty that the telegraphic report is true. That the steamer has gone down I do not doubt, but I am incredulous in regard to the loss of all on the vessel."

"To my thinking the chances are great that some of the people on board were saved, and so there is a probability that the girl escaped. It will only take a day or two for the truth to come out, and until then I shall not give up hope."

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PLOTTERS.

A PERFECT bloodhound was the Westerner, sticking to his investigation with all the tenacity of the brute on the trail of a fugitive.

But in spite of his wonderful acuteness and perseverance he was not able to boast of having made any progress.

The Englishman could not find the drug clerk, although he searched diligently.

It was no trouble for Grimshaw to discover the haunts of Louis Klein, the sporting clerk; not a prominent pool-room in the town but had been patronized by him, and so he was well-known, not only by the proprietors, but all the rounders were equally well-acquainted with him.

And when the seeker-after-knowledge discovered this fact he chuckled gleefully, for he anticipated that the job he had undertaken would be an easy one.

The Englishman was a wily customer, and he

went to work in an extremely cautious manner, for he understood how necessary it was to avoid alarming the man for whom he was seeking.

If the drug clerk had been guilty of any crooked work, and it should come to his knowledge that a stranger was making earnest inquiries after him, he might take fright immediately and seek refuge in flight.

Bearing this in mind Grimshaw devised a cunning plan.

He pretended that he was a greenhorn who had been unlucky in "following the races," and had been informed that Louis Klein was a remarkably lucky man, so he had come to the natural conclusion that if he could get the drug clerk to give him some points he would be able to get back some of the money which he had lost.

The rounders laughed at the notion, for, to use the vernacular of the sports, they regarded Klein as being a "sucker of high degree," and a man who would venture money on any "tip" which he might get from him would give ample proof that he was the biggest kind of a fool.

Grimshaw expressed his surprise, of course, but thanks to this ingenious yarn he had no trouble in getting all the information the men possessed.

The knowledge was easily obtained, but the man himself he could not get at.

As nearly as he could find out, no one had seen the drug clerk for a week or so.

"Gone broke and so he don't come 'round!" the sports declared.

"Got a stake on condition that he cut his lucky!" was the Englishman's conclusion, and this was the report he made to Old Sunflower.

The Westerner shook his head, said it was tough to have luck run so contrary, but instructed Grimshaw to still keep on the watch.

"Men are a good deal like rabbits in some respects," Old Sunflower remarked.

"When a rabbit is hunted he generally travels in a circle, and humans try the same trick some, times."

"The man has either gone away or else he is in hiding, but, to my thinking the prospect is good that sooner or later he will make his appearance, and if the watch is kept up we will get him."

The Englishman thought there was a good deal of sense in this reasoning and promised to keep a good lookout.

A week passed away.

During that time the examination of Milcent Thorwood took place, and the young lawyer, Kingswell, had no difficulty in showing to the satisfaction of the court that the girl's story was true, and proved beyond a doubt that she was not the woman who had married Wolf, so she was discharged from custody.

After being released she took up her quarters with some relatives of Kingswell, who, through the young lawyer, had become interested in the girl and gladly offered her the shelter of their roof.

As Old Sunflower had anticipated, all on board of the San Jacinto had not perished, when in the dead of night the stout vessel laid her bones on the Florida reefs.

Fully one-half of those on the steamer had escaped, for the reef was one only some few miles from the mainland.

The newspapers published lists of the saved and lost, and in the latter appeared the name of Laura Lake.

Great was Old Sunflower's disappointment when he came to this name.

She was the only woman on the steamer who bore the name of Laura, and the Westerner felt pretty certain that she was the girl of whom he was in search.

"Luck ain't running even in this hyer thing!" he exclaimed.

"So far the rascals have had all the best of it; but there is an old saying, 'It is a long lane which has no turning,' and I reckon things must come my way sooner or later."

"If I get any fair show I am willing to bet big money that I will nail 'em, for no matter how smart a rascal may be, there never was one yet who did not make some big blunder sooner or later, but if the game is going to run with all the good strokes of luck on their side and none on mine, it stands to reason that I can't do much."

Old Sunflower indulged in these cogitations on the evening of the day that the girl's examination and discharge had taken place.

And while in the solitude of his room in the hotel, he was puzzling his brains over the matter, Doctor Grolance and the livery-stable keeper, Mangood, seated in the office of the physician, were in busy consultation.

Mangood had just entered the room at the time we introduce the two to the notice of the reader, and from the way in which Grolance greeted him, it was plain that the doctor had been anxiously awaiting his coming.

"I was detained by Colonel Normand," Mangood explained.

"Aha! about the insurance business?" exclaimed the doctor, eagerly.

"Yes, the colonel came to see me, as the company want to compromise the matter."

"Oh, they do?"

"Yes, and the colonel wanted to find out what I thought about the matter."

"Oh, no! no compromise!" Grolance exclaimed, with a decided shake of the head.

"That is exactly what I told him," the Jew declared.

"You understand, my dear Grolance, the moment the company commence to talk compromise, it is proof positive they have come to the conclusion that they stand no chance to win if they resist payment of the insurance money on the ground that Wolf committed suicide."

"It would be folly for them to set up such a claim," the doctor remarked, thoughtfully.

"By this time, now that the evidence is all in, they understand the case, and that is the reason why they are talking compromise."

"You took high moral ground, of course," the doctor remarked, with a somewhat sarcastic smile.

"Oh, yes; I understand how to work the oracle," the stable-keeper replied, nodding his head in a wise way and indulging in a sly chuckle. "If Wolf had committed suicide, I would have been obliged to lose the money which I had been unwise enough to lend him; but as it was a clear case of murder, I would be the biggest kind of a fool to give up what I was justly entitled to by both law and equity."

"That is it—that is the way to talk!" the doctor exclaimed, rubbing his hands briskly together.

"The high moral ground always pays; and what did the colonel say when you told him that you would not listen to any talk of a compromise?"

"He attempted a little bluster at first; said his principals were not completely satisfied that Wolf had been murdered, despite the verdict of the jury, and their legal advisers, although they had not made a complete examination of the case, yet were inclined to think there was a good fighting chance for them."

"You laughed at the idea, of course, and invited them to come into court as soon as they liked."

"Exactly; and the way the colonel dismounted from his high horse was astonishing."

"They know that their case hasn't got a leg to stand on!" the doctor exclaimed, contemptuously.

"I do not think there is any danger of their attempting to contest the claim," Mangood remarked. "This visit of the colonel's was a last, desperate effort. The insurance people know that they don't stand any chance to legally resist the payment of the money, but they thought that there might be a show for them to crawl out of the payment of all the money by trying a little bulldozing."

"We are too old birds to be caught by any such shallow tricks!" the doctor declared.

"Yes, but you must remember that the insurance people have not the pleasure of knowing us intimately, and so they fell into the error of thinking that big words might be of some avail."

"Oh, no, that will not do at all. We want cash—the solid stuff—and words will not answer."

"That is exactly what I gave the colonel to understand."

"We are out for the ducats, and I would not abate a single dollar of my just claim—no, not one cent!"

"It has been a difficult game to play, but as things appear now, I think the chances are fair that we will win without being put to much more trouble."

"Well, it does look that way; but there is one point in regard to which I feel a little uneasiness."

"One point, eh?"

"Yes."

"Explain."

"This rough old fellow who comes from the West."

"Flowers?"

"Yes; there is something about that man which I do not like," the Jew remarked, slowly. "I cannot exactly explain what it is, but the idea has come to me that he is dangerous."

"I do not like the looks of the man myself, and like you, I am at a loss to explain why it is that I distrust him," the doctor asserted, a grave look on his strongly-marked features.

"He seems to be a bluff and honest-hearted old countryman, gifted with considerable shrewdness in certain ways, but in others as innocent as a child."

"Yes; a good type of his class."

"When he called on me in regard to the loan which I made to Wolf, I was at first rather inclined to laugh at the idea of this old blunderhead bothering himself about the matter, but I took just about as much pains to explain the affair to him as though he had been the smartest detective in the land."

"That was wise," the doctor remarked, with an approving nod.

"At that time I had no suspicion that the man was likely to prove dangerous," the Jew remarked.

"I simply regarded him as a meddling old fool, who was bothering himself about a matter

which did not at all concern him; but now that I have had an opportunity to reflect upon the matter, I have come to the conclusion that the old man might prove to be an ugly customer if an opportunity was afforded him."

"Ah, yes; I do not doubt it is the truth, but such a thing is not likely to happen," the doctor declared.

"Our scheme was too carefully arranged, and we have carried the matter out in so fine a style that it does not seem to be possible any one can get at us."

"Yes, you are right; it certainly looked as if everything had been safe; but, somehow, the idea of this old fellow meddling with the matter makes me nervous."

"I should not allow the matter to trouble me," the doctor remarked.

"Unless we make some terrible blunder, the man does not stand any chance to work us harm."

"Oh, well, if we are careful we will not make any mistake," Mangood observed.

"That is my idea, of course," Grolance assented. "So far we have done remarkably well, and I do not see any reason why everything should not go on all right to the end."

"The insurance money is surely ours, and, thanks to the stroke of fortune which gave the documents into our hands, I think we stand an excellent chance of getting a large sum of money out of Mrs. Macfarland."

The old Jew chuckled.

"Aha!" he exclaimed, "that was a lucky chance indeed!"

"Oh, yes; it was singularly fortunate; and so altogether unexpected, too; but then, you know, it carries out the French saying, that it is the unexpected that always happens."

"Yes, yes, and I think it is very true too."

"Everything is going on smoothly, and as far as I can see there is not a single weak spot in our game," the doctor observed in a thoughtful way.

"The girl I was a little fearful of, although I took all possible care to arrange the affair so that she could not have any clear idea of the game in which she played so prominent a part."

"Of course she could not help suspecting that there was some plot on foot, but just what it was it would puzzle her to decide."

"From what I know of her I should judge that she was not the kind of girl to trouble her head much about the matter so long as she got her money all right," the old Jew remarked.

"Well, that is about the kind of woman that she is, but for all that I am just as well pleased to have her dead as alive, and I think it was a fortunate thing for us that the San Jacinto went to the bottom."

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN UNPLEASANT SURPRISE.

MANGOOD nodded his head sagely as the other came to the end of the sentence.

"Yes, I think you are right," he remarked. "As far as we are concerned the girl is certainly better out of the world than in it."

"Although we did get her to go to Texas, and she agreed to remain there as long as we paid her a regular weekly salary, yet I had a suspicion right from the beginning that in time she would get tired of staying down there and make her way back to New York, no matter how much money we gave her to remain away."

"Yes, with a woman of that kind not much can be done," the doctor observed, slowly.

"They are as wild as hawks and apt to do exactly what they should not," he continued.

"The only way to keep them in order is through the influence of fear," the Jew suggested.

"You are right; you cannot reason with such creatures; they act through impulse, and usually without regard to the consequences, and therefore I am glad that she is out of the way, so it will not be possible for her to trouble us."

"Oh, yes, in the time to come she would have been apt to have made mischief, and I fully agree with you that it was a fortunate thing for us that she found a grave beneath the waters," the old Jew remarked.

At this point the conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door, which the doctor had taken the precaution to lock after Mangood's entrance.

Grolance turned the key, and then into the room came a good-looking young woman, a blonde with short, curly locks, yet possessing dark eyes.

"She was a showy girl, with a dashy way; one who would be likely to attract attention almost anywhere, although robed in a perfectly plain dark, traveling-dress."

She had worn a heavy veil over her face, but raised it upon entering the room.

A look of surprise appeared on the faces of the men as the girl smilingly saluted them.

"Judging from your looks, my appearance here is something of a surprise to you, and a rather unwelcome one too I should think," the new-comer remarked with a saucy toss of her head, and there was a spiteful tone in her voice.

"Talk of the—ahem!—and he appears!" the old Jew muttered.

The quick ears of the girl caught the words.

"Oh, I was the subject of your conversation?" she exclaimed.

"Really, gentlemen, I feel honored!" she continued, in a mocking way, and she made a low courtesy.

"Yes, we were just speaking of you," the doctor remarked.

"Wondering how it was, you know, that so smart a woman as yourself could not have managed to escape," he continued.

"Take a chair and tell us all about it," he added.

And then, as the girl turned to get the chair, Grolance deftly turned the key in the lock, performing the movement so adroitly that the piece of metal made no sound as it moved.

Then the doctor took a chair—the nearest one to the door, and looked in an inquiring way at the girl.

"By the way, I suppose I had better introduce myself!" the girl exclaimed, abruptly, with a grimace.

"I have no doubt that you gentlemen are laboring under the delusion that you have seen me before—possibly that you were well acquainted with me, but I will soon show you that there is some mistake about the matter."

The men looked surprised, and the old Jew observed:

"You are speaking in riddles, my dear, and as neither the doctor or myself are good at that sort of thing, we will have to trouble you to explain."

"Certainly! I shall be delighted, of course," the girl responded, in a slightly sarcastic way.

"When I made my appearance, I presume that you gentlemen took me to be one Laura Lake, a young lady with whom you were once very friendly, but if you will have the kindness to take a good look at me, I think you will see that, though I bear quite a resemblance to that Sixth avenue belle, yet in some respects I am so different that if an acute detective in search of Miss Laura, and provided with an accurate description of her, should encounter me, he would never take me to be the woman he wanted."

"Miss Lake had long, straight hair, rather inclined to be kinky near the roots, like a negro's wool, but few people ever noticed the fact, mine, you will observe, is short and curly; hers was a dark brown in color, mine is a golden blonde, quite English, you know."

"This is a small matter, but it changes a person's appearance mightily."

"Very true; still you bear such a resemblance to Miss Lake, that any one who was acquainted with her would be certain to take you to be the lady with her brown hair cut short and bleached to a blonde hue," the doctor observed.

"Oh, yes, I am aware of that fact, and that is the reason why I wear a veil when in the street, and take particular care to keep away from Sixth avenue," the girl responded, with a dry laugh.

"It is so disagreeable, you know, to be taken for somebody else," she added, with a saucy toss of her well-shaped head.

"Ah, yes, that is true," the doctor assented.

"My name is Annie Jones," the girl explained. "I am aware that it is not half so pretty a name as Laura Lake, but I can't help that, you know."

"Oh, no, it is a good sensible name, and you have no reason to be ashamed of it," the old Jew remarked.

"Suppose you tell us your story so we can understand this matter," the doctor suggested.

"Yes, explain, my dear girl, and do not keep us wondering in the dark!" Mangood exclaimed.

"I have no objection. There isn't a great deal to tell and it will not take me long."

"In the first place as I said, my name is Annie Jones, and I am an orphan, a Canadian girl, without any friends or relatives in this country, and none to speak of in Canada."

"I came here with my mother when I was about sixteen years old, and at once went out to service as a governess, being well-educated."

"My mother was taken ill a few months ago and I left my place to nurse her."

"She died and then I looked about for another situation. One was offered me by a lady in New Orleans, and I sailed in the steamer, San Jacinto, to take it."

"As it happened I was placed in the same state-room with a New York girl named Laura Lake."

"I, being of a confiding nature, told her all about myself, and she being of a different disposition merely said she was going to visit some friends in Texas, which was all the information she gave me."

"Then came the shipwreck in the dead of night."

"We just had time to dress and then we were bundled into a boat."

"Half-way to the shore a big wave overturned the craft, and, as luck would have it, I was the only one who succeeded in clinging to the boat. Laura Lake was washed away and drowned before my eyes."

"Another big wave righted the boat and I managed to clamber on board, and so finally got safe to land.

"As it happened, none of the rest who were saved came ashore within miles of that particular point, and when the people who gave me shelter asked my name and I told them Annie Jones there was no one able to dispute it."

"It was an extremely smart trick!" the doctor declared with an approving nod.

"Yes, yes, you were very wise to arrange the matter in that way," the Jew assented.

"I was always a prudent girl in some respects," the young woman went on. "Although I do not believe that anybody ever gave me credit for being so, and therefore I had my money safely put away in the bosom of my dress, and was able to keep on in my journey, which I did as soon as possible for fear that some of the passengers might come across me and make the mistake of thinking I was Laura Lake."

"Very good idea indeed," the doctor commented.

"But woman proposes and fate disposes, you know. I started with the firm intention of carrying out my contract with you, but on the train I met my destiny!" the girl declared, impressively.

CHAPTER XXXII.

COMING TO AN UNDERSTANDING.

A FROWN appeared on the brows of the two men as they exchanged glances.

"You met your destiny, eh?" the doctor queried, with a lowering look.

"Yes, that is the truth, although to judge by the look on your faces, you are not inclined to accept the statement as such," the girl replied, in an airy, scornful way.

"Oh, I have no doubt that you thoroughly believe it," Mangood remarked. "But the trouble is that you have probably believed the same thing a dozen times before, and so it has got to be an old story."

"It is a sure enough thing this time. I have got it real bad, I tell you!" the girl declared, with another saucy toss of her head.

"A few words will explain.

"As I told you, I started for New Orleans all right with the firm intention of keeping my agreement with you to the very letter, but on the train I made the acquaintance of the nicest young Englishman that I ever encountered."

"It was a mash on both sides at first sight!" the girl continued, with a reckless, bravado air.

"He was a tourist, doing the country, and had just come in for a large property in England, and he showed me letters from his lawyers and man of business to prove that he was speaking the truth."

"As he was so frank with me I had to be equally so with him, therefore I told the finest kind of a ghost story."

"I was an orphan who had been robbed of her estate by a rascally trustee, so I had been forced to go out as a music-teacher, and was now en route for New Orleans with the expectation of marrying an old gentleman of wealth there who had taken a fancy to me, and though I only respected the man because he had been kind, yet I had almost agreed to marry him."

"That afforded the young man a fine cue to speak," the doctor observed, with a sardonic smile.

"That was my game, of course, and he was quick to avail himself of the opportunity, making me an immediate offer of his hand and heart."

"Upon my word, my dear little girl, you were in luck!" the old Jew declared, with a chuckle.

"I played shy, of course, although I admitted that I was greatly tempted to accept his offer, but I pretended to be afraid that my old Southerner would surely kill me if I deserted him."

"We were within a few miles of Mobile when this conversation took place, and he immediately suggested that we need not go to New Orleans, but could get off at Mobile and then return to New York, where we could take steamer for England."

"I allowed myself to be persuaded to adopt this course, although all the time professing to be terribly alarmed about the old Southerner's anger," the girl continued, with a saucy smile.

"That was to lead up to a change in my appearance, which I finally suggested. By cutting my hair short and changing its color, I would baffle any detectives that the old gentleman might employ to hunt me up."

"A very clever scheme," Mangood declared.

"I thought that it was pretty good. I did not want to come back to New York without changing my appearance, for I did not know how matters had gone here, and I remembered your caution to take all possible care not to allow anybody to know that I had anything to do with Wolf."

"You are not in the habit of reading the newspapers, I believe," the doctor observed.

"That is correct; in fact, I seldom read any-

thing. Once in a while I do indulge in a novel, but if it is at all dry I can't go it."

"Then you are not posted in regard to what has taken place here in New York since your departure?"

"No, I haven't heard a word about anything," the girl replied in an indifferent way.

"Prepare to be astonished then," Grolance said.

Then he related the particulars of the death of Udolpho Wolf and the trial of his supposed wife.

The face of the girl became dark and she shook her head in an angry way.

"I do not like this at all!" she declared.

"You don't?" the doctor asked in a mocking way.

"No, I don't!" she exclaimed. "And if I had known that you were going to play any game of this kind, I would not have had anything to do with it!"

"Well, my dear, the mischief is done now, and there is little use of crying over spilt milk; it certainly will not mend the matter," the old Jew observed, with the air of a philosopher.

"It seems to me that you have managed the matter so that I have been placed in a dreadful position!" the girl declared.

"If the police should succeed in getting hold of you it would certainly not be agreeable," the doctor remarked with one of his sardonic smiles.

"It really looks as if I murdered the man!" the girl exclaimed with an anxious face.

"The proof against you does seem to be strong," the Jew observed.

"The fact that you were the woman who bought the morphine would go far to make people think you committed the murder, and your hurried flight and return to New York in disguise would not do your case any good," he continued.

"Do you suppose I would be fool enough to bear the brunt of it all alone if I am unlucky enough to fall into the hands of the police?" the girl exclaimed, angrily, her dark eyes flashing fire.

"No, indeed! If I am arrested I shall make a clean breast of it and tell all about the share that you two men had in the matter!"

Both the doctor and the Jew laid back in their chairs and laughed in the face of the angry woman.

"Ah, now, my dear little girl, I fancy you do not know what you are talking about!" the doctor declared.

"You will tell all you know, eh?" the Jew exclaimed. "Now, my dear, just run the matter over in your mind, and see just what you will be able to reveal."

"First and foremost you can say that I was the man who introduced you to Wolf, and suggested that it would be a good speculation for you to marry him, as he was evidently infatuated with you and had plenty of money."

"Yes, I can say that, and also that after I was married to Wolf, and discovered just what a worthless, drunken loafer he was, you came and said you had devised a scheme by means of which you thought you could get some money out of Wolf's wealthy relatives, but it would be necessary for me to get out of the way, and you offered to pay me twenty-five dollars a week if I would go to Texas and stay there for a year."

"Now, my dear girl, do you suppose I would admit for a moment that there is any truth in that statement?" Mangood asked.

"Oh, no; I should declare that it was utterly ridiculous," he continued.

"I would admit that I had introduced you to Wolf; no harm in that, you know, but declare that after the introduction I did nothing more."

"Just think the matter over carefully," the doctor warned.

"If you remember, the details of the scheme were planned in this room," he added. "Mangood brought you here, and we talked the thing over and arranged the scheme; but if you attempt to give the thing away, both of us would swear that no such meetings ever took place, and it would not be possible for you to prove that they did."

For a moment the girl's breath came thick and hard, and in her eyes was the wild glare of a hunted animal.

"Oh, you devils!" she cried, at last. "You coolly and deliberately arranged the scheme, so that if it did not succeed the law would take me for a victim."

"My dear little girl, it really pains me to hear you talk so foolishly," Mangood declared, in a soothing way.

"You need not be alarmed," the doctor asserted. "Even if you are arrested by the police and accused of having murdered Wolf, you will get out of it all right, if you will only have faith in us."

"We can get you out of the scrape, provided you act according to our directions."

There was an incredulous look on the girl's face.

"I am not sure that I can trust you," she said.

"You would be very foolish not to trust us, and more foolish still to attempt to fight against our power," the doctor replied, with cool determination.

"Now, then, let me show you how the game must be arranged," he continued.

"In the first place, you must do all in your power to avoid being arrested."

"You have made such a change in your appearance that there is not much danger of the detectives arresting you, for all they have to go upon is a vague description of Mrs. Wolf, and you do not answer it at all; but if through any accident you should be unlucky enough to be captured, you must put on a bold front, declare that you were innocent of having any hand in your husband's death, and that you fled simply because you made the discovery that it would not be possible for you to live with any such man."

"That is true enough," the girl declared. "I never could have got along with him."

"As for the morphine business, you must declare in the most solemn manner that it was not you who purchased it, and you do not know anything about the matter," the doctor advised.

"I don't believe the clerk could identify me, for I had my veil down," the girl observed, slowly.

"He has disappeared and no one knows what has become of him," Grolance remarked.

"And as for the druggist himself as he has already identified one woman as being the one who made the purchase, if he should come into court now and swear that you are the one who bought the drug his evidence would not amount to anything."

"Oh, no, a good lawyer would tear him all to pieces!" the old Jew declared.

"Besides what possible object could you have for wishing Wolf out of the way?" the doctor asked.

"That is true; I could not gain anything by his death," the girl said, thoughtfully.

"Exactly, and a woman like yourself could not bring herself to commit such a crime without being urged to it by a strong motive."

"Ugh! there isn't anything in the world which would tempt me to do such a thing!" the girl declared with a shiver.

"And now that I come to think of it," she continued, "I don't see how you two could have had the nerve to do it."

"My dear girl it was a stupid blunder!" the doctor replied.

"We did not want to kill the man. It was all an accident. It was necessary for the success of our schemes to get Wolf in a helpless condition so we could go through him and secure certain documents which he possessed."

"He was pretty drunk when he came into the room, if you remember, but as he was an old soaker I saw that we must use the drug to fix him," the doctor explained.

"I had it in the side pocket of my coat, and with the cunning which some drunken men possess, Wolf discovered it was there, stole the vial and emptied the contents in his glass of whisky under the belief that it was a vial of cordial which I am in the habit of using; then he boasted of what he had done and swallowed the dose before we could stop him."

"Oh, how horrible!" the girl exclaimed, covering her face with her hands.

"Yes, it was a dreadful accident, and if we had not acted promptly, it might have cost us dearly," the doctor affirmed.

"If we had been discovered with the body we certainly would have been accused of murdering the man, and we should undoubtedly have had hard work to get out of the scrape."

"Well, I am free now and can marry my Englishman then as soon as I please," the girl observed, so volatile by nature that she had already recovered from the depression into which she had been cast.

"That is one reason why I came to see you," she continued. "I wanted to see if there wasn't some way for me to get clear of Wolf."

"You can go ahead with your new matrimonial speculation whenever you like, my dear," the old Jew observed.

"Wolf is dead, and you, his widow, are free to marry again."

"Well, if he had been alive I don't think I would have allowed a little thing like that to have kept me away from my Englishman, the girl declared in her saucy way.

"I would not have risked it in this country, but after I had crossed the water, and was safe in England, I should not have been afraid."

"Well, now, if you will take my advice, you will get out of the country as soon as possible," the doctor counseled.

"You understand that if the police get you, and your story becomes public property, the chances are great that you will lose your Englishman."

"Oh, yes, I understand all about that, and you can rest assured that I shall go as soon as I can," the girl replied.

"I am staying in Brooklyn, and as I never knew a soul there, there is not much danger of my being recognized. But now about my allowance. I shall need money until I secure my prize."

The doctor counted out a hundred dollars and gave it to the girl.

"There is a month's allowance; get out as soon as you can."

"Be sure that I will!" she responded, gayly. The doctor unlocked the door, and the girl departed.

CHAPTER XXXIII. A BAD SHILLING.

AFTER the girl left the room, neither the doctor nor the old Jew spoke for a few minutes, both being deep in meditation.

Grolance was the first to break the brief silence.

"I hope that no bad result will attend the re-appearance of Laura," he said, slowly.

"She is an uncommonly smart girl, and knows how to take care of herself as well as any woman I ever encountered; still, for all that, I would be better pleased if she was down in Texas."

"Ah, well, my dear fellow, we cannot always have everything in this world exactly as we want it, you know," the old Jew observed, with the air of a philosopher.

"That is true enough."

"And really, when you come to reflect upon the matter, does it not seem as if it would be far better to have this girl in England, married and settled, than in Texas?"

"Yes, it certainly does appear so," the doctor replied. "If she was in Texas, the chances are great that sooner or later she would get tired of the country and make her way back to New York."

"But if she goes to England and marries her Englishman, there is not much probability of her ever troubling this country again."

"Yes, if she will only take care not to be nabbed by the police before she gets out of the country," Grolance remarked.

"She is a remarkably shrewd girl, and as she is playing for a big stake just now, there is hardly a doubt but what she will use the utmost caution, so I do not think there is much danger of the detectives getting hold of her," the old Jew affirmed.

Here again the conversation was interrupted by a knock at the door.

The doctor rose to answer it, but before he got fairly on his feet the door opened and a young, sallow-faced fellow, whose yellow hair and blue eyes suggested the Teuton race, made his appearance.

He was poorly dressed, his clothes being much the worse for wear, and he looked like a man who had encountered considerable hardships.

He looked first at the doctor, then at Wolf, and then burst out into a hoarse laugh:

"Oh! you two are together!" he exclaimed. "Well, well, I think I see now how the cat jumps!"

The doctor and the old Jew looked at each other in amazement for a moment, and then they stared at the new-comer.

"What do you mean by such language, sir?" the doctor questioned, sternly.

"Oh, going to ride the high horse, are you?" the other cried, with a sneer.

"You surely are not unwise enough to pretend that you don't know me?"

The doctor advanced a step and cast a searching glance at the stranger.

"Ah, yes, I recognize you now, although, with your unshaven face, and tramp-like aspect, I did not at first," Grolance remarked.

"Yes, I am the cat that you used to pull the chestnuts out of the fire with—I am Louis Klein!"

"Well, sir, what can I do for you?" the doctor asked, in a quiet way, but his manner indicated a wish that the man should state his business and then depart as soon as possible.

"I never had the pleasure of meeting this gentleman before," Klein observed, with a nod to the old Jew, "but I don't suppose I am making any mistake when I jump to the conclusion that you are Mr. Mangood, the gentleman who holds the big life insurance on Wolf."

"Yes, Mangood is my name, but as to my holding a life insurance on anybody, I don't see how it can interest you at all," the old Jew remarked, sharply and shortly.

"Oh, but it does, for I am the man who gave the woman the poison with which Wolf was killed—I am the man who made the murder possible—who gave you the chance to collect the insurance money!" the man said, in a bravado way.

"I didn't know what kind of a game was going to be played when the doctor here roped me into it," the drug-clerk continued.

"I knew something was up, of course, because he was so deuced particular about the thing. I was to take the vial with a flaw in it, put it on the shelf, and call the druggist's attention to the bottle, so he would be apt to know it when he saw it again."

"Then when a woman came in and said 'morphine' to me, I was to fill this particular vial with the drug and give it to her, and after she was well out of the way, I was to take particular care to have the druggist understand all about the matter."

"I told you at once, as soon as you had fully explained the scheme to me, that it would be almost certain to cost me my position; not that I cared much about it, for I was sick of the old

man, and of New York, too, and would be glad to get out West, where I would have a chance to grow up with the country, but I had no money to go on."

"Then, in the kindest manner possible, you said that you did not want me to work for nothing, and if I would arrange this little matter, you would present me with a hundred dollars."

"I jumped at the offer, of course, I would be a fool not to, and I did the job for you."

"I will have to admit that you were as good as your word, and paid the money over like a man."

"I have no complaint to make on that score. After getting the money, I started for the West and got along all right until I came to Chicago, where I concluded to lay over for awhile; there I fell in with a lot of sharpers who cleaned me out, but it took the gang a week to do the job."

"During that time I read all about this Wolf business, and it did not take me long to come to the conclusion that there was a big game afoot."

"I think I can see as far into a scheme of this sort as any man that lives," the fellow declared, with an insolent leer.

"And it was an easy matter for me, when I read about the life insurance business, to decide that you two were partners."

"You used me as a cat's paw to get the poison; then you killed Wolf, arranging the thing so it would look as though the woman did it, and when the insurance money is paid over you will divide it."

"Oh, it is a great scheme!" Klein exclaimed, with a hoarse laugh.

"I have heard of a great many smart games in my time, but this is a little ahead of anything that ever came in my way."

"You are pleased to be complimentary," the doctor remarked, in an extremely sarcastic manner.

"Oh, no! I am giving it to you as straight as a string!" the man declared, with another insolent laugh.

"After I got to the bottom of this thing, I put on my thinking-cap, and I soon came to the conclusion that a hundred dollars was mighty poor pay for the work I had done, when the big sum of money that you two are going to collar is taken into consideration, and so I determined to return to New York and have a talk with you about the matter."

"You might have spared yourself the trouble," the doctor rejoined.

"You mean to imply that I am going to have my trouble for nothing."

"Yes."

"I am not so sure of that as you seem to be!" Klein declared, in a defiant way.

"And I can just tell you too that I had a terrible time in getting here," he continued.

"But you can judge a little about that by the way I look," the man remarked, with a glance at his dilapidated clothes.

"The Express train carried me to Chicago in about twenty-four hours, but in coming back I was over a week on the road."

"I did not keep an accurate account of the number of times I was put off the cars, but I should judge that it was at least fifty, and on ten or a dozen occasions I got pretty roughly handled, too."

"That, you see, was before I got into the tramp's way of doing business, and was fool enough to talk back when the railroad men 'sassed' me."

"But I kept on, stealing a ride when I could, walking when I had to, and begging my way from door to door."

"I kept on, and here I am at last, come back like a bad shilling! I am glad to find you two in company, for it gives me a chance to explain matters so you will understand that when you grab the insurance money I want a fair share of the swag."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DOCTOR'S ANSWER.

WHEN Klein finished his speech he helped himself to a chair with the air of a man who felt that he was master of the situation, stretched out his legs, then chuckled in an insolent way.

He was somewhat surprised, however, that his words had not made more impression on the men to whom they were addressed, although he was careful not to allow the others to perceive this.

Both the doctor and the old Jew had listened to him in the calmest possible manner, neither one seeming to be at all disturbed by his threatening words.

"I fancy, Klein, that you have been drinking," the doctor remarked.

"That is true. I was lucky enough to catch a couple of suckers as I came up the street and got enough coin to catch on to four beers, and as I haven't had much to eat to-day I do not doubt that the booze has made me a little lively, but I have not taken enough to hurt me. I know what I am about, all the same," the fellow declared in an ugly way.

"Oh, no, that is not the truth," the doctor remarked.

"It is evident to me that the beer has affect-

ed your head, or else you would never have come here and talked in this foolish way."

"Oh, I have talked foolish, have I?" Klein snarled.

"Yes, that is so; I don't ever remember to have heard such a rigmorole in my life outside of a lunatic asylum."

"Aha! you are going to show fight, hey?" the drug-clerk exclaimed, angrily.

"If you mean by showing fight that I have no notion of paying any attention to your ridiculous story, you are quite right," the doctor replied in the most contemptuous manner possible.

"You are crazy!" Klein declared, excitedly. "Don't you understand that I can ruin you? Yes, ruin the pair of you, for if I tell my story you will not only not get the insurance money, but you stand a chance to be hanged for Wolf's murder!"

Both the doctor and the old Jew laughed outright at this declaration, and they could not have laughed more heartily at the richest kind of a jest.

"Oh, no, my man, it is you who are crazy, not we!" the doctor answered.

"Mad as a March hare!" Mangood asserted.

"If you had any sense you wouldn't come here and try to scare us by empty threats," Grolance declared.

"Now, my dear fellow, do try and be a little reasonable—try and look at this matter in the same light that all the rest of the world will be certain to regard it," the doctor continued.

"Take into consideration the position that you occupy in the world, and the standing that we possess, for in this matter, if we have any trouble about it, it is going to be your word against ours—or, to put the case properly, your word against mine, for you never came in contact with Mr. Mangood until you met him in this room."

"That is true, but he is a pal of yours and in the same boat!" Klein declared in a sullen way.

"It is easy for you to make that assertion, but I fancy that it will not be so easy for you to prove it," the doctor retorted.

"You must admit that of your own knowledge you do not know anything about it—all is but mere vague, unsubstantial speculation."

"Yes, but I know that it is true all the same," Klein declared, doggedly.

"I am not going to try to change your belief—you can believe what you like for all I care," the doctor retorted.

"I am talking of what you can prove to the satisfaction of the world."

"You have told your story, now listen to mine, and try and compare the two."

"Try to put yourself entirely outside of the case—make believe you have not any interest in the matter, so your mind will not be prejudiced either one way or the other."

"I can do that easily enough, but all your fine talk will not alter things," Klein declared, in a dogged way.

"I am not trying to alter anything," Grolance retorted.

"All I want to do is to make you see things as they really are, and not as you imagine, or would like them to be."

"He is going to present the sound, unvarnished facts, my man, and if you are wise you will pay heed to them," the old Jew advised.

"Now, then, you and I are countrymen, coming from the same town, where we grew up as boys, although we were not acquainted, but when we met in this country, the fact that we were natives of the same village naturally made us feel as though we were more than strangers."

"When we first met you were a clerk in a drug-store in the Bowery which I was in the habit of using as a headquarters, and so we became acquainted."

"That was a couple of years ago, and when you went up-town I met you occasionally in a German saloon on Third avenue."

"About two weeks ago I encountered you there, and you told a pitiful story. You had lost your place, having become mixed up with bad associates, and saw no way to get a fresh start excepting by going West."

"I took pity upon your unfortunate situation, and as you were a fellow-townsmen, loaned you twenty-five dollars in order to help you along."

"You departed, full of gratitude, and I knew nothing more about you until you came in here this evening, and being under the influence of liquor, attempted to blackmail me."

"That is the story you will tell, eh?" the drug-clerk asked, evidently much astonished.

"It is, and I defy you to disprove it," Grolance exclaimed.

Klein rose to his feet.

"Well, I'm off," he said.

"All right! It does not make a particle of difference to us whether you are or not," the doctor rejoined.

"Do you know where I am going?"

"No, nor do I care!"

"I am going straight to Police Headquarters."

Both the doctor and the old Jew laid back in their chairs and laughed.

"I will tell my story there, and then we

will see how the thing will end!" the drug-clerk exclaimed, in a vindictive way.

"I can tell you now how it will end!" Mangood announced.

"You can?" Klein asked, doubtfully.

"Yes; I am a prophet, you know—the seventh son of a seventh son, and all that sort of thing," the old Jew responded, with a laugh.

"It will end with your being sent up the river to Sing Sing for blackmail, for neither the doctor nor myself are the kind of men to stand any nonsense.

"If you are foolhardy enough to make any charges against us, you must take the consequences!" the liveryman declared, firm determination written on his dark face.

"I'll show you—curse you!" Klein exclaimed, in a rage, retreating toward the door.

"Remember! if you attack us, it will be war to the knife, and we will not show you any mercy!" the doctor warned.

Klein halted with his hand on the door-knob.

He had played a bold game, but his scheme was an utter failure, and he was conscious of it.

"You are not wise to drive a desperate man to do a rash act," he declared, in an irresolute way.

"Aha! you are weakening, are you? and disposed to be a little sensible, I hope?" Grolance exclaimed.

"Well, I am not anxious to quarrel with you, for you have always treated me well," the fellow said, with an utter change in his manner, all his bullying way vanishing.

"Talk sense, and we will listen to you," the doctor remarked.

"But, my dear friend, you must understand right in the beginning that there isn't any use for you to attempt to try any bulldozing tricks on old, tough men of the world like the doctor and myself!" the old Jew declared.

"We will not have it, you know," he continued. "If you attempt to put the screws on us, you can depend upon our fighting you, tooth and nail, every time, for that is the kind of men we are!"

"I took the course which seemed to promise most," Klein declared, in a dogged way.

"And by so doing you made the biggest kind of a mistake!" the doctor replied.

"In a case of this kind, 'easy does it.' You cannot make anything by trying a bluff game with us.

"You would have made out much better if you had come in the guise of a suppliant, told the story of how you have fared in the West, and asked for assistance.

"I am ready to do anything in reason, but I think I ought to have more than a hundred dollars," the drug-clerk said, in a sullen way.

"Well, I am not the kind of man to stand on a few dollars," the doctor declared.

"I will give you another hundred on condition that you leave the city to-night and return to the West," he continued, consulting his watch.

"There is a train leaves the Grand Central Depot somewhere around midnight, and the 'sleepers' are open at nine or ten o'clock. My clothes will fit you, and I will make you a present of a suit, so you will look decent. Write me in a week and I will forward you another hundred, but there the matter must end."

Klein gladly accepted the terms, Mangood called a cab, and an hour later the drug-clerk entered the sleeping-car in the Grand Central Depot, feeling like another man; but the bloodhound was on his track, although he suspected it not.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE SHADOWS.

THE pair of plotters whose doings we have chronicled, in our last chapters, were uncommonly shrewd men, but for all their shrewdness, they did not possess sufficient keenness to suspect that the office of the doctor was "shadowed."

It had never entered their minds that suspicion could possibly attach itself to them, for they had managed matters so cunningly that it did not seem as if the shrewdest bloodhound on the force could get a clew.

Old Sunflower had "figgered" the matter out in his peculiar way, but with all his wonderful acuteness, it was like groping in the dark, until the fortunate accident of Mrs. Macfarland seeking his advice made him acquainted with the fact that the documents which had been stolen from the girl, Milicent, in the Wolf apartments in the Ben Hamet flats, on the night of the murder, were in the possession of Dr. Grolance.

The moment he ascertained this, it was plain to him that his suspicion in regard to the German having had a hand in the murder was correct, for otherwise he could not have obtained the girl's papers.

The Westerner visited the chief of police and explained the matter.

The superintendent was amazed, for, being an unusually acute bloodhound himself, he

was able to appreciate talent in that line in another.

But as both he and Old Sunflower realized that that they had some uncommonly smart rascals to deal with, they resolved to proceed with the utmost caution, for they understood that if the pair had any idea they were suspected, it would be an extremely difficult matter to catch them.

The first move the man-catchers made was to place "shadows" on the houses of both Dr. Grolance and the old Jew.

The spies were instructed to be extra careful, and to take all possible care to avoid being suspected.

"If the pair are communing with rascals, it ought not to take us long to find it out," the chief of police remarked.

It was Old Sunflower's idea that the German doctor was the head of the plotters, the old Jew being the respectable cloak through whose aid the insurance money was to be obtained, and therefore the Westerner hired a furnished room in a house directly opposite to the doctor's so he would be near at hand.

The house was on a corner, and a beer saloon occupied the lower floor, which rendered it an easy matter for Old Sunflower to gain entrance to his room by going in through the side door in the by street, then through the yard and up the back way, without any danger of his being perceived by any one in the main avenue.

The doctor had three rooms in his house, a front one which he used as an office, a middle room where he received his patients, and a rear bedroom.

The shadows were instructed to follow all suspicious persons who might call upon the doctor, and tracked them until they discovered who they were.

If the doctor had been a popular one, with a long list of patients making office visits, this task would have required an army of spies to carry it out successfully, but the German had few patients, and no office-callers to speak of, so the six spies who were detailed upon the service were ample to attend to it.

Old Sunflower was in charge of the shadows, and kept a wary eye upon them so as to be certain they diligently applied themselves to their duties.

And so it happened that when the saucy young woman, who called herself Annie Jones, left the doctor's office, one of the spies immediately followed her.

It chanced that this particular shadow had the reputation of being one of the best in his line in the city.

In person he was an undersized, innocent-looking fellow; in fact, a good judge of mankind, after taking a careful survey of his face, would have been apt to get the impression that the man was a little weak in the upper story—not exactly right in his mind, and it would have taken a wizard of the first degree to have guessed that this thin, consumptive-looking fellow, who, in his rather shabby dark suit, had the appearance of a workman out of a job, was one of the best all-around athletes in the city, a man of dauntless courage, and who was able to go into a ring with professional boxers and hold his own with the best of them.

His appearance was so greatly in his favor, that many an old and experienced rascal had been run to earth by this shadow, without having the slightest suspicion that this weak, harmless-looking fellow was a spy on the watch.

When the young woman left the house, where in the doctor's office was situated, she hesitated for a moment on the doorstep and took a careful survey of the street.

The doctor's warnings had made her cautious, and she wanted to be sure that there wasn't any spies in the neighborhood before she proceeded on her way.

Now, although the young woman had an extremely sharp pair of eyes, and had been brought up in a school where she had learned to use them to the best advantage, yet it was not to be expected that, even with her wits sharpened by the semi-theatrical life she had led, she could be smart enough to detect a first-class man doing the "shadow act" merely by looking around her.

Nothing suspicious could she detect. All the people on the street seemed to be going on about their business, and so, after a moment's survey, the girl proceeded on her way.

She went directly to the nearest Third avenue L station, and as she ascended the stairs the shadow, who had followed at a safe distance in the rear, began to swear softly to himself.

If there is anything that the city police spy hates, it is to see the prey whom he is tracking take to the L Roads, for the chances are about ten to one that unless the station is prominent, where plenty of business is done, so there are many passengers, the shadow cannot follow the game without exciting suspicion, if the tracked one is on the watch.

"This girl has got her eyes open!" the spy muttered, as he hurried up the steps after the woman; he had noticed how she had inspected the surroundings before she ventured into the street.

"And if I don't make a bungle of the thing on

account of this infernal L Road it will be a miracle."

What he feared came to pass.

The girl was out of sight when he arrived at the ticket-seller's window, so he bought his ticket and then passed into the waiting-room; as he did so he came directly under the gaze of the young woman, who was seated on the further side of the room.

The spy assumed his most innocent air and affected to be examining the pictorial advertisements on the walls.

"South Ferry train!" cried the gateman, as the train came up.

The girl hurried to the platform, and the spy followed.

There were only a couple of passengers to get off, and the girl, who had suddenly taken the idea that the solitary young man might be a spy, resolved to trick him, for she noticed he had not been in a hurry to board the train, but was right in her rear.

She blocked the passage so he could not pass, and began to question the conductor.

The train started; she gave a little cry of alarm, the conductor pulled her on board and banged the gate in the face of the young man.

The shadow was left behind.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

PLANNING THE FLIGHT.

OF course the spy made a desperate attempt to board the train, but all the guards repulsed him.

There isn't anything that the average L Railroad man enjoys more than to slam the gate in the face of a tardy passenger and then grin broadly while the passenger gives vent to his rage.

"The jig is up now!" the shadow muttered, in a sullen rage. "And all that is left for me to do is to report how easily this woman played it on me."

"She was up to snuff evidently, and must have spotted me right from the beginning, or else she never would have been able to work the trick so well."

This particular shadow had one rare merit; if he made a blunder, he never attempted to conceal it by descending to falsehood, thereby giving his chief a false impression.

So, when he returned to Old Sunflower, he gave a full and true account of all that had occurred.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the Westerner, "I am blamed sorry that the woman succeeded in giving you the slip. From the way she worked the scheme it is plain she had good reasons for not wanting to be followed, or else she would never have taken so much trouble."

"I am sorry, sir; I did my best, but these L roads play the deuce with a man once in a while," the shadow remarked, with a regretful air.

"Oh, that is all right—I am not blaming you. I am sart'in you did all you could, but I am awfully afeard that we have let a mighty important party slip through our fingers; better luck next time, though, I hope!" Old Sunflower remarked, in his cheery way.

And then orders were given to the spies that, if the woman came again, three men were to follow her.

"Surely one of the three ought to be able to keep her in sight, no matter how cunning and able she may be," the Westerner muttered, reflectively.

"I am sadly afeard, though, that we are locking the stable door arter the hoss is stolen, for I have no idee that she will come ag'in. She must have got a scare to-night, and that will be apt to make her skittish 'bout coming round these hyer parts for some time."

Old Sunflower was right in this conclusion—the girl had got a scare, for when she saw how determined an effort the man made to get on the train she became satisfied he was a spy who had set out to track her.

"This looks ugly," she muttered. "How did the man come to get on my track? There isn't anything about me to excite suspicion."

Then she reflected upon the matter for a moment.

"There is only one explanation," she murmured. "The doctor's house is watched—and if that is a fact it shows that suspicion has been directed to him."

"The police are on the alert, and they are going to follow everybody who visits the doctor in hopes of making some important discoveries."

"He ought to know this, for I do not believe he has any suspicion that the detectives are on his track."

Then she mused over the matter for a few moments in silence.

"I suppose I ought to give him a hint of how things are," she muttered.

"But I don't think I will," she continued. "He got me into this ugly scrape without allowing me to have any idea of what a dangerous game they intended to play."

"Both of them made a regular cat'spaw out of me, and since they were so smart as to get into

the trouble I think that it is only right for me to keep quiet and let them get out the best way they can."

Having come to this determination the busy mind of the girl began to plot and plan.

"I must get out of the country as soon as possible," she muttered. "And as suspicion has evidently been excited I must take care that some watchful detective does not rob me as I go on board of the steamer."

"That is the old game, to keep watch of the steamers, but I fancy they will not catch me," and the girl nodded her head in a confident way, while a scornful smile appeared on her face.

"I must make arrangements to start at once—to-morrow at the latest. We can take the Long Island Road to the end of the island—the detectives, keen as they are, will never think of a fugitive making his escape from New York in that direction."

"If there is a watch set it will be at the big depots of the great trunk lines."

"We can cross to the Connecticut shore, then go north by the interior lines to Canada, and finally come out at Halifax, where we can get a steamer to England, and I fancy there isn't a detective in the country smart enough to catch me if I only get a good, fair start."

As the girl had traveled with a variety troupe all over the New England States and through Canada, she was thoroughly posted.

"I do not think there is a doubt but what I can carry this scheme through successfully," she declared, after debating the matter in her mind for a while.

"I have baffled the detectives to-night, and unless I am extremely unlucky I think I will get things all right!"

She was sanguine, but this is an uncertain world.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

ONE of the most cosmopolitan of places is the famous Hoffman House saloon, the "Art Gallery," as it is often jestingly termed on account of the large number of costly paintings which adorn its walls.

After nightfall it becomes a sort of exchange, where may be found prominent men of all nations.

All are free to enter and enjoy the privileges of the place, whether they patronize the bar or not, provided they are decently dressed and know how to behave themselves.

To this popular resort we will now transport the reader.

At just about the time when the girl was having her adventure with the spy, the Englishman, Joey Grimshaw, sauntered into the saloon.

Thanks to the liberality of Old Sunflower, he had been enabled to become a gentleman of leisure, and took his ease with the air of a millionaire.

He had not given up his search for the missing drug-clerk, and made a point of visiting all the resorts where sporting gentlemen were wont to congregate in hopes of hearing some news of him.

Grimshaw had hardly gotten well within the saloon when he was warmly greeted by a medium-sized, well-dressed young man, who could have been picked out for an Englishman by his costume and manners, as far as could be seen by any one having the slightest knowledge of the subject.

"Why, Joey, old chap, how are you?" the young man exclaimed, hastening toward Grimshaw with extended hand.

"Blow me tight, hif it ain't Tommy Brown!" the ex-valet cried, shaking hands with the other.

"Oh, no; stow that!" the other replied, with a quick glance around, as if to notice whether any one had paid any attention to the salutation.

But in such saloons people pay no attention to the salutations of friends, and none were observing the two.

"Stow what, my tulip?" Grimshaw asked, surprised by the exclamation.

"The Tommy Brown," the other replied.

"That was all well enough for the Old Country, but it don't go here."

"Ow is that?"

"My name is Reginald Hawhurst."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes!"

"It won't work! I know better a blarsted sight, you know! 'Awhurst was your master. You were 'is valet, just as I was to Lord Dickey 'Oward."

"Well, Hawhurst has gone back to England, and I am sporting the name just now," the young man explained.

"Ah, yes; I twigs!"

And Grimshaw nodded in a knowing way.

"I suppose you 'opes to pick hup one of these Hamerican gals with lots of coin?"

"Well, that was my little game, but, somehow, I have never been lucky enough to do the trick."

"I wonder hat that, for you are just the kind of man to work it."

"But will you 'ave a glass of something?" Grimshaw asked, in a hospitable manner.

"Sit down and give hit a name, you know."

The pair took seats at a table, a waiter was summoned, and a couple of bottles of "Bass" ordered.

"Ah, that is the stuff—that makes me think of dear old Lunnion!" the young man remarked, as he held up his glass so the light could shine through the amber-colored liquid.

"Yes, there's no place like 'ome, though I 'ave got along very well on this side of the 'erring pond," Grimshaw observed.

"Well, I can't say that I have," the other observed in a reflective way as he sipped his ale.

"The trouble with me is, you know, that I am too fond of the pastboards. If I would let gambling alone I would get on well enough, but, somehow, I can't resist the temptation when I have any money in my pocket, to back my game, and the result of this deuced foolish infatuation of mine is that I am in the worst kind of a hole just at present."

"That is bad."

"Yes, it is very bad. The way I am situated I ought to be off to England as soon as possible, and here I am stuck in New York because I hav'n't got the money to pay the fare of myself and the young lady who is about to become my better half."

"Going to get married, eh? Well, I wishes you luck!"

"My dear fellow, when my master took himself back to England, and the idea came to me that I might be able to catch one of these rich American girls by assuming his name, I immediately went into the game."

"I had saved up considerable money, so was able to cut quite a dash, and then I got in with a lot of bookmakers—turfmen, you know, who took a fancy to me, and put a good bit of money in my way. I have no doubt I would have got along all right if I could have let gambling alone, but I couldn't, and so I lost my money about as fast as I made it."

"A man like you ought to know better."

"We all have our little weaknesses, you know," the other declared in his airy way.

"But I have struck a good thing at last, as you will see if you will have patience to listen to my tale."

"Go on!" Grimshaw exclaimed, encouragingly.

"We 'ave hall the night before us."

"I was on my to New Orleans to attend the races there, as one of my bookmaker friends had promised to arrange matters so I could make a good bit of money."

"Ah, that his the kind of friends who are worth 'aving!" the other declared.

"On the train, as we were running through Florida, I made the acquaintance of a young lady, who impressed me as being about the cleverest girl I ever encountered."

"Your Hamerican 'einess, hey?"

"Oh, no, she hadn't any money. She was a music-teacher on her way to New Orleans, but her manners, her style, completely captivated me, and I hadn't been acquainted with her more than two hours before I popped the question."

"That was quick work!" And then Grimshaw shook his head.

"But I say, old pal, wasn't you sort of making a fool of yourself by thinking of taking up with a girl without any tin?" he continued. "Love is all very well, of course, but it takes money to make the mare go."

"Oh, I am not such a fool as would appear," the young man declared.

"The girl hasn't any money, but she is as smart as a steel-trap, with a splendid musical education, and a magnificent voice."

"I have seen a good deal of that sort of thing, you know, for I am a kind of a musical genius myself, and the idea came to me that I could make a good thing out of this girl by taking her to England and putting her on at the music halls."

"Ah, yes, I see. Well, now, Tommy, old pal, it strikes me that it is not a bad idea."

"It is a deuced good one, by Jove!" the other exclaimed.

"The chances are, you know, that I can get ten or fifteen pound a week out of the scheme. I will be the manager, don't you know, and attend to the cash."

"Yes, of course. But, I say, do you think you can get the girl to do it?"

"Oh, it will undoubtedly take a little time to bring her up to the scratch, but I will get her there," the other declared, confidently.

"I shall have to manage the affair carefully, of course."

"At present she knows me as Reginald Hawhurst, and I am an English gentleman who has just come in for a large property, you understand!"

"Yes, yes, that is the usual tale, and how the precious gudgeons do swallow it, too!"

"When we get to England, I shall make the astounding discovery that my confidential man of business has bolted with all my cash."

"That is natural. They all do it!"

"I have property, of course, but it is so tied up with leases and bequests to various relatives that I am not able to get anything out of it!"

"That old story."

"I shall be plunged into utter despair—don't know what to do—starvation stares us in the face—nothing left for me but to make a hole in the water, or else try the effect of a leaden pill!"

"It is really a beautiful game you are laying hout!" Grimshaw declared.

"Then I suddenly remember her musical talents. I grasp at the idea, as a drowning man to the rope which promises to bring him safe to land!"

"Beautiful, beautiful!" cried the other, rubbing his hands gleefully together.

"I explain to her that I know all the people who run the music-halls, and it will not be difficult for me to get her engagements."

"Her vanity will be aroused; she will agree to make the trial; the odds are a thousand to one that she makes a success, and I will be put in possession of an income of ten or fifteen pounds a week, and all the work I will have to do will be to collect the swag."

"Tommy, my tulip, you are a genius, and I don't see hany reason why this scheme will not work."

"Oh, it will, I am certain. The only possible hitch is that the girl may refuse, but I don't believe she will. She is used to singing and playing in public, so it will not be a new thing for her to face the footlights."

"Then, too, although she told me a straight enough story, yet I fancy she did not tell me all. She was on her way to New Orleans, where she expected to marry a wealthy old Southerner—going to marry him just to get a home, and when I got her to accept me, she pretended to be so afraid the Southerner would come after her that we stopped at Mobile, and she had her dark hair cut off short, and then bleached to a blonde hue, thus completely changing her appearance."

"That was hodd!" Grimshaw remarked, his attention immediately aroused.

"And when we came to New York she insisted upon going to Brooklyn, where we got furnished rooms, and she never goes out without putting on a veil so as to partially hide her face."

"Looks as if she was afraid some one might recognize her," the ex-valet suggested.

"Yes, but she pretends that she don't know much about New York, although from the way she speaks once in a while she appears to be well-posted."

"Very hodd!"

"And she is dreadful anxious to get off to England as soon as possible too!"

"That seems as if she was afraid some one was after 'er."

"It may be that she is running away from home, or she may have cut and run from a husband," the young man suggested.

"Oh, yes, not unlikely. Women are hup to all sorts of strange tricks nowadays."

"We were going to start to-morrow. I had the money all right, but was fool enough to go into a gaming-place and lost about all of it, worse luck!"

Then he finished his ale and drew forth his handkerchief.

"Hello! that's a queer 'wipe!" Grimshaw exclaimed.

"It is the girl's; I picked it up by mistake."

"'Ere's a h'ell marked in one corner," the ex-valet remarked. "Does her name begin with h'ell?"

"No, Annie Jones is what she calls herself; but that may not be her real name, you know."

A vague suspicion had been gathering in Grimshaw's mind while the young fellow had been telling his story, and the discovery of the mark on the handkerchief strengthened it.

"Say, I think I can put you in the way of getting a raise!" he exclaimed, abruptly.

"How much will do you?"

"About a hundred. I gave the girl fifty to spend and she said she did not need it, but would keep it for me, so if I have a hundred I can pull through all right, for as soon as I get to London I can get a loan of a few pounds without any trouble, and then it will not take more than a couple of weeks to arrange the music-hall business."

"I know a party who sometimes takes a little flyer in the way of a speculation if 'e sees good money in it," Grimshaw explained.

"'E is a queer old customer, and once in a while don't mind putting up money for a little crooked work, provided the swag promises to be big and the risk small."

"A sort of a genteel 'fence,' eh? A fellow who disposes of stolen goods?"

"Yes, but 'e will not 'ave hanything to do with common rascals. Now if I explain this matter to 'im, and show that you will strike a pot of money as soon as you get your music-hall business going in London, 'e will, I think, find the tin, particularly if I go security for you, and I will do it, for I know you are all correct."

"You're a deuced good fellow, Joey!" the other exclaimed.

"Hand as there isn't hanything like striking when the iron is 'ot, come with me and we will 'unt the old chap hup, right away!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE ACCOMMODATING OLD MAN.

"THAT is a deuced good idea!" the young Englishman declared, immediately. "But I say, isn't it rayther late?"

And as he spoke he glanced at the clock, which showed that it was nearly eleven.

"Oh, no, 'e is an all-night bird, and just about this time we are likely to find 'im at 'is rooms, which hare only a few minutes' walk from 'ere.

"Has you are in a 'urry to get hoff, the sooner the matter his settled the better," Grimshaw added.

"Oh yes, that is true. I cannot make anything by waiting here in New York."

"The hold man is mighty quick to jump hat an offer if it strikes 'im favorably, and if we can do hany business with 'im the hods are big that we can get the money to-night, so you will be hable to start in the morning."

"That is just what I would like to do, so let us go immediately."

The two set out, and Grimshaw conducted his countryman to where Old Sunflower was directing the operations of the shadows.

In a few words the ex-valet explained the situation.

"Oh, yes, always glad to accommodate any friend of Mister Grimshaw, with whom I have done considerable business to our mutual profit," the Westerner declared.

Old Sunflower comprehended how the land lay as soon as the explanation was made.

Grimshaw's suspicions had been excited in regard to the woman, and he believed she was worth looking after.

"I will advance you a hundred, provided Mr. Grimshaw is willing to go security for you," Old Sunflower remarked.

"I will be glad to do that, for I know that my pal 'ere is true-blue, and wouldn't go back on a friend for the world!"

"And I say, gov'nor, wouldn't it be a good idea for you to take a trip to Brooklyn and 'ave a look at the lady?" Grimshaw suggested.

"You are a judge of that sort of thing," the ex-valet continued. "And you could see in the twinkling of an eye that my pal 'ere isn't giving you no fairy story when 'e says 'e stands a chance to make big money out of the girl."

"Isn't it rather late?" Old Sunflower asked, yet showing by his manner that he was inclined to accept the invitation.

"Oh, no!" the young Englishman exclaimed. "Our rooms are only a block from the Bridge, and we can get there in half an hour."

"She always waits up for me, and we have a glass of ale before we go to bed."

"All right! I am with you, and if she is anything like what you represent, you shall have the ducats to-night," Old Sunflower declared.

"I am just old lightning when it comes to business, you see!" the Westerner added, with a good-natured grin.

The Englishmen expressed their satisfaction, and the three started.

Forty minutes later, Hawhurst—to give him the name which he had assumed—ushered his companions into the room where "Miss Annie Jones" sat, yawning over a novel.

"These are some old friends of mine," he explained, when the girl rose in surprise.

Old Sunflower cast a rapid glance at the girl, and then remarked:

"Waal, I reckon I know this little lady."

The young woman was immediately troubled. There was something about the big stranger which made her apprehensive of danger.

"I really do not remember to have ever seen you before, sir," the girl replied, smiling sweetly in the face of the stranger, and endeavoring to appear perfectly at ease.

"Oh, I know you, if you don't know me!" Old Sunflower responded, to the consternation of the girl. "The fact is, I have been on the lookout for you for over two weeks now, and had almost given up all hope of finding you, and r'ally to stumble on you this hyer strange way seems like a special act of Providence."

"Pon my word, gov'nor, you hare speaking in riddles," Grimshaw exclaimed.

"The young lady understands all about it," Old Sunflower replied.

"Indeed I do not, sir!" the girl declared, endeavoring to put a bold face on the matter.

"I am fully as much in the dark as to your meaning as these gentlemen can possibly be!"

"Is that so?" Old Sunflower exclaimed, affecting to be surprised.

"Waal, then, I reckon I will have to explain the matter to you, and as this hyer business is strictly private, only concerning this young lady and myself, I shall be much obliged if you two gentlemen will retire so as to give us a chance to talk the matter over by ourselves."

"Certainly! glad to be able to oblige you!" Grimshaw exclaimed, quickly, before his companion could speak.

Hawhurst did not know what to make of it. He could see from the expression on the girl's face that she was alarmed, although she was doing her best to conceal her feelings.

"Come along," Grimshaw continued, taking the other by the arm.

"I will go, Annie, if you say so," the young Englishman observed, irresolutely.

"I think you had better, although, really, I don't see why the gentleman should wish to see me alone," the girl remarked, affecting a composure which she was far from feeling.

"All right, I'm agreeable," Hawhurst replied, and then the two departed, Grimshaw taking occasion to remark after they got out into the hall, that, "hof all rum goes, this 'ere was the rummiest 'e 'ad ever struck."

"Take a seat," said Old Sunflower, "for I reckon we will have quite a talk together."

The girl sunk into a chair, her heart beating wildly, for a terrible apprehension weighed upon her soul.

Old Sunflower seated himself in a rocking-chair, and then surveyed the girl with a critical eye.

"So you have cut your hair short and changed the color from dark to light, thereby making quite a change in your appearance."

"It would be a smart detective indeed who would be able to recognize you if he hadn't anything but your description to go on."

"I don't understand what you mean, sir!" the girl declared, her breath coming thick and hard.

"Oh, yes, you do, and it will not do you any good to pretend to be ignorant."

"You are in the net, and you might as well make a clean breast of it."

"You are smart enough; that was clearly proven to-night by the expert way in which you threw one of the best shadows in New York off your track."

"I was on the watch when you came out of the doctor's office this evening, but the change which you had made in your appearance baffled me, and not until you tricked my spy did the notion come to me that you might be the very woman I wanted."

"In figure you do bear a great resemblance to this girl who was arrested by mistake for you, and I don't wonder that the German druggist, who was not acquainted with either one of you, should not have any hesitation in swearing that this Miss Thorwood was the woman who bought the poison."

The girl felt for a moment as if all the blood in her body had rushed into her head.

Her senses reeled and she thought she was going to faint.

By a desperate effort though she fought off the feeling.

"It is all a mistake!" she gasped with white lips, hardly able to speak.

"I—I do not know what you mean!"

"Oh, yes, you do, and it isn't of any use for you to try to deceive me!" Old Sunflower declared.

"The game is up, and before the sun rises I will have both the doctor and the old Jew safe behind iron bars, Mrs. Wolf!"

"Oh, heavens!" cried the girl in anguish.

"I have managed to net all the gang concerned in Wolf's murder, with the exception of the woman who decoyed the Thorwood girl to the house, so she might be found there by the police, and arrested under the supposition that she was the woman who had married Wolf, and so give you time to get safely out of the way."

"This is terrible!" the girl moaned, utterly overcome.

"The drug-clerk I nailed to-night at the Grand Central Depot, just as he was going to skip out of New York, and when he found he was in for it, he was glad enough to tell all he knew about the matter, for he realized that he was in a pretty bad scrape."

"Now then, if you are wise, you will follow his example, and make a clean breast of it."

"We are bound to get at the truth in time," Old Sunflower warned.

"Certain to discover all the facts, even if you will not speak a word, so it will be a sensible thing for you to tell all you know."

"Even if you had a hand in the murder itself, by turning State's evidence you will save your neck."

The girl shrunk with horror.

"Oh, no, no! do not think as badly as that of me!" she exclaimed.

"I know I have been a wicked girl, but I have never stained my soul by any such dreadful crime!"

"Make a full confession then and reveal just what part you acted in the conspiracy," the Westerner urged.

"I know that the old Jew introduced you to Wolf, and I have the letter in your own handwriting which you wrote to him at Long Branch, urging him to hasten to the Ben Hamet Flats—to the house which it had been determined he should never leave alive."

"I will confess all, though it is terrible!" the girl moaned.

"I thought I was going to get safe out of the country," she continued. "And I had made up my mind that after I was married to this Englishman, who is wealthy, I would lead a different kind of a life."

"My dear woman, as far as this Englishman and you are concerned, it is diamond cut diamond!" Old Sunflower declared.

"He is a fraud, and hasn't got any more

money than you have. His idea is to take you to England, put you on at the music-halls, and live in idleness on your earnings."

"He hasn't even money enough to pay the steamer fares."

"He did have!" the girl exclaimed, in wonder.

"Yes, and lost it gambling to-night. Then he happened to run across this other Englishman, who used to be Wolf's valet and has been acting as a secret agent for me since I began to investigate this case."

"When he told your story to my man, he was shrewd enough to suspect that you might be the missing Laura Lake, and so decoyed the other to me, under the pretense that I would lend him money."

"So you need not worry about missing this chance, for you never had any. If you have to go back to your professional life, you had better go on your own hook and take care of your money yourself."

"I am amazed!" the girl declared, anger flaming in her eyes and coloring her cheeks.

"I would not have believed that it was possible for any one to make such a fool of me!"

"It is the truth, and the only chance there is for you is to accept my offer."

"I will do so!" the girl exclaimed. "Although you have hunted me down without mercy, I have faith that you will do all you can for me, if you are satisfied that I am trying to do what is right to the best of my ability."

"You can bet all you are worth on that, miss, and you will win every time!" Old Sunflower declared.

"You are right about the old Jew introducing me to Wolf, and it was done so that I might marry him, as he was struck after me," the girl explained.

"I was led to consent to the marriage because both the old Jew and the doctor declared he was a very wealthy man, and I agreed to pay both of them a good round sum for their trouble."

"But after I was married, I soon discovered that my husband not only did not possess any money, but he expected me to keep on in my stage career and give him my earnings."

"A great many of these dashy men-about-town who run after actresses and women in public life who are believed to make a deal of money calculate to work a game of that sort."

"I soon discovered, too, that my husband had got to that stage when he could not do without liquor—a regular drunken beast!"

"In disgust, I told my fellow-conspirators that I would not live with the man, and then they persuaded me to get the poison, saying that they would drug him, and, when he was in a stupor, get him to commit forgeries on his wealthy relatives, and then, by threats of sending him to jail, they could extort money from some of them."

"I did not exactly understand how such a scheme could be worked, but, as they were positive we would all make money by it, I weakly consented to aid them, and they agreed to give me money to go away to Texas, where I could get a divorce without any one being the wiser."

"And, believe me, not until long after Wolf was dead, and buried, had I any idea of what took place on that awful night."

"You gave the poison to the doctor?"

"Yes."

"And then he managed to induce Wolf to take it. His life was insured in favor of the Jew for a large sum, to secure borrowed money, so it is pretended, but the notes that the Jew holds are probably forgeries, and the insurance was placed upon Wolf's life so he might be murdered and the plotters reap a harvest by the deed."

"Yes, isn't it perfectly dreadful?" the girl declared.

"I have got them dead to rights now!" Old Sunflower exclaimed, with grim satisfaction.

"I shall have to lock you up for a while as a witness, but I'll see that you come out all right."

And, to the amazement, real of Hawhurst, pretended of the ex-valet, the Westerner carried the girl off in a coach.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AT MIDNIGHT.

AFTER Grolance and Mangood got the drug-clerk on board of the sleeping-car, they parted, the Jew intent upon spending an hour at one of the Broadway theaters, while the doctor returned to his office.

A little after eleven, Grolance, just as he had settled down for a comfortable smoke, before going to bed, was surprised by the appearance of the old Jew, who came bustling in as though he had important news to tell.

And in truth so he had, as the doctor speedily discovered.

"Aha! a piece of good luck!" he cried.

"Good! What is it?"

"I met Colonel Norwood, the insurance man, you know, at the theater."

"Yes."

"And he informed me that his company, acting under advice from their lawyers, have concluded not to make a contest, and so will pay the insurance money."

"That is capital news!" the doctor declared. "Still I must say that I am not particularly surprised, for I did not anticipate that they would contest the claim, for they had no case, and it does not require a man to be an eminent lawyer to see it, either."

"Yes, yes, I know, but these corporations are dreadfully pig-headed sometimes, and will go to law when it is apparent from the beginning that they do not stand any chance at all to win."

"I do not know how it is, but I have had faith right from the commencement of this affair that we would not have any trouble about getting the insurance money, if we could successfully manage the rest."

"Well, I am always inclined to be a little doubtful, you know; that is my nature," the old Jew remarked. "And so I am free to confess that the colonel's announcement to me tonight took a weight from my mind."

"The only thing that has worried me is the unexpected appearance of the drug-clerk and the girl," Grolance observed.

"Well, we have got rid of both of them without any trouble, so we need not concern ourselves about them."

The doctor agreed that this was true, and in order to celebrate the brightening of the skies, he got out a bottle of wine, and the pair drank it in great glee, discussing the while the particulars of the game which seemed now so likely to bring a goodly sum of money to the plotters.

"Hello! it is near twelve!" the old Jew exclaimed, happening to look at his watch. "I had no idea it was so late. I must be going!"

Then there came a hurried tap at the door. The doctor opened it, and a well-dressed lady, with iron-gray hair, evidently well in years, but strong and muscular as a girl of twenty, came hurriedly into the apartment, closing the door carefully behind her after she entered.

"Ah, madame, what brings you here at such an hour?" the doctor inquired.

"I fear there is danger afoot!" the woman exclaimed.

"Ah, the deuce!" cried the old Jew, leaping to his feet.

"Explain!" demanded the doctor.

"I did not intend to stop to-night," the woman said. "I have been making a call, and passed this way on my homeward road."

"You know, my brave, that I always keep my eyes about me," she continued, addressing her conversation directly to the doctor.

He nodded assent.

"You can judge of my surprise when I discovered men in the neighborhood who seemed to be engaged in watching this house, and the moment I became satisfied of this I determined to come in and warn you."

"That is right; you are quite certain that you have not made any mistake?" the doctor asked, his face dark with anxious thought.

"Oh, no, I cannot be fooled on this spy business, for I have seen too many of the vermin in my time!" the woman declared.

"I do not understand it; I was not aware that we have made any mistakes," Grolance observed, evidently greatly troubled.

"I cannot understand how it can be possible for the attention of the police to be directed to me."

"They are outside, my brave, and it is best you should know it."

Hardly had the words left the woman's lips, when the door was thrown violently open, and Old Sunflower, with three detectives at his back, marched into the room.

"You are all wanted; hold out your hands for the bracelets, please!" the Westerner cried.

And almost with the word, the detectives snapped the handcuffs on all three.

"This is an outrage! Of what are we accused?" cried the doctor.

"Of the murder of Udolpho Wolf!" Old Sunflower replied. "And I have the proof to convict you, too. Mrs. Wolf and the drug-clerk have both confessed!"

And at this point one of the detectives drew forth from the doctor's pocketbook the papers which had been stolen from the girl, Milicent.

"Aha! here is more proof!" the Westerner exclaimed.

"I know nothing of this matter!" the woman declared.

Old Sunflower surveyed her closely for a moment.

"Oho, Mother Hans, is it you? the woman who went up for ten years for counterfeiting twenty years ago?"

And then he was suddenly struck by the likeness which the doctor bore to the woman.

"By gum! this must be your son! I remember that you had a limb of Satan then."

"I know you now!" the woman fairly shrieked. "You are John Flowers, who was chief of the detectives here twenty years ago."

And this was the truth. Old Sunflower, in his young days, had been at the head of the New York detectives.

His brother was a doctor in the asylum where Milicent's mother had died, and he learning the story of the mad woman from her ravings, had

got the once celebrated detective to come East to help the daughter, as he feared that if she got into Wolf's hands he would strive to rob her of her fortune, for when Wolf had come to the asylum after the death of the railway king, he had impressed the doctor as being a wicked and unscrupulous man.

Our tale is told.

A few more words only.

The plotters were convicted, but escaped the gallows, as the evidence was not direct in regard to the murder.

Twenty years in Sing Sing is a terrible punishment though.

In Mrs. Macfarland the orphan girl found a second mother, but there are whispers that the young lawyer, who came so gallantly to her rescue, will soon bear her to his mansion as his bride.

And when the wedding takes place, you can depend upon it that there will be no more welcome guest than the Hayseed Detective, Old Sunflower.

THE END.

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